



# WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL WORK IN UTTAR PRADESH

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

**Doctor of Philosophy**

IN

**WOMEN'S STUDIES**

BY

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

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ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

ALIGARH - 202002 (INDIA)

2012



30 OCT 2014



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*Dedicated  
To  
My Beloved Parents*



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**Certificate**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled '**Women in Agricultural Work in Uttar Pradesh**' submitted by **Miss Priya Salomi Lartius** is the original work of the candidate, and is suitable for consideration for the award of Ph.D. degree.

  
**(Dr Azra Musavi)**  
**Supervisor**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*Working on the Ph.D. has been a wonderful and often overwhelming experience. I first want to thank Almighty God for helping me and giving me the wisdom to complete my research.*

*Writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance. First and foremost, my utmost gratitude to my worthy supervisor, Dr. Azra Musavi. Throughout the process of preparing this work, she has been a source of inspiration and encouragement. I thank her for listening to my views and helping me to learn from her own experiences.*

*I wish to express my sincere thanks to Prof. Shireen Moosvi, Director of Centre for Women's Studies, for giving me the opportunity to work under her guidance and also for providing useful suggestions and inputs. My earnest thanks to the renowned historian Prof. Irfan Habib for being a part of this research. My special thanks to Mr. Mujahid Kazmi (Director F.I) for helping me during my visit to the Ministry of Agriculture, New Delhi.*

*I wish to record my gratitude for the help I received from the staff of the following institutions and libraries: the Parliament House Library, New Delhi; the National Archives of India; Central Secretariat Library; Indian Council of Historical Research; Agricultural Ministry; Indian Council of Agricultural Research; Jawaharlal Nehru University; Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University; Department of Geography and Department of History for providing me valuable references.*

*My special thanks to all the faculty members of the Centre for Women's Studies, especially Dr. Faisal Aziz. I would like to thank the library staff Mr. Ashar, Ms. Nikhat and Mr. Shariq. I would also like to thank the office staff members Mr. Sajid, Mr. Waseem, Mr. Sabir, Ms. Seema, Mr. Amit and Mr. Suresh for providing all the help during my research.*

*In no words I can thank my father Mr. J. W. Lartius and my mother Mrs. Vinita Lartius for having faith in me and always encouraging me to give my best. Special thanks to my brother Mr. Mohit Lartius and Sister in Law Jyotsna Lartius for given me endless love and support throughout the course of my work. Completing this work would have been all the more difficult without the support of my friends and fellow scholars.*

**Priya Salomi Lartius**

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# Chapter I

## *Introduction*



## **INTRODUCTION**

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture sector and form the bulk of the agricultural work force in the world. They are responsible for half of world's food production and are the main producers of staple crops such as rice, maize and wheat, which accounts for 60 to 80 per cent of the food intake in most developing countries. In rural areas it is always women who are responsible for ensuring the well being of their families and at the same time works on agricultural fields. Women are also the key players in day-to-day agricultural tasks, the instigators of activities that generate agricultural and non-agricultural income and the custodians of natural and productive resources (ILO, 2007). Rural women are the most important productive work force in the economy of the developing nations including India. Their role varies considerably among and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world where economic and social forces have transformed the agriculture sector (FAO, 2011 a).

Women's participation in the Indian rural economy is significant as about 84 per cent of the economically active women population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities (GOI, 2006). Women's daily work in agriculture, fisheries and forestry as well as in food processing and market is evidence of the vital contribution they make in the rural

economy. Still, access to productive resources such as land, credit, inputs, appropriate farm technology, training and extension services have always been insufficiently available to women. It is known from early civilization that women were the first agriculturists, while men went out for hunting and tending livestock (Habib, 2001). In simpler systems of agriculture, the cultivation of ground by means of the wooden digging stick, the stone hoe or an iron blade was done by women, though the physically stronger male sex was often called upon to perform some of the heavier tasks (Goody and Buckley, 1973). Later the introduction of plough in agriculture displaced women towards less skilled operations. Ploughing became the most skilled activity and was dominated by the male agricultural workers. Since then the sexual division of labour emerged and women's role in agriculture became secondary.

This “gender gap” hinders women's productivity and hinders their contributions in agriculture sector. It also restricted in the achievement of broader economic and social development goals. (Sulaiman *et al.* (2003) described the term ‘gender’ as the socially determined attributes of men and women. These included, differences in economic and non-economic functions of male and female, differential access to and control over resources and differences in knowledge and skills. Therefore the term ‘gender’ referred to the socially constructed relationship between women

and men. The concept of gender with respect to work is also essential for gender analysis. Gender roles were visible not only in division of work but more significantly in the allocation of wages, rewards and recognitions in society. Certain farm activities and roles were taken for granted for women simply because of the fact that they were considered the weaker sex, while others were considered fit for men (GOI, 2001 b). This showed that gender bias was institutionalized by the society. Although, the gender awareness scenario revealed that women performed more than sixty percent of agricultural operations but their contributions remained undervalued and marginalized (*ibid*). Gender as a socially construct must be understood in right perspective for developing harmonious roles of women and men in agriculture production process.

An exploration of in-depth gender information will also lead to saving of human and non-human resources. In spite of women's great involvement in agriculture, they remained invisible and their contribution in agriculture remained unaccounted and their problems remained unattended. This lacuna was seen in almost all the States of India. Uttar Pradesh being the most populous and an agricultural State was also characterized by a high percentage of landless women workers (Arunachalam and Kalpagam, 2006; Gupta and Maiti, 2008). In North India various caste systems forbid women from working on agricultural

fields. Although women constituted 47.31 per cent of the population in Uttar Pradesh, only 6.35 per cent women were actively involved in work force (Census, 2001). Out of this workforce 71.18 per cent females were employed in agriculture sector. Statistically more women than men were employed in agriculture still, there existed gender based inequalities. Almost everywhere women faced more severe constraints than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services. They were also restricted from performing those agricultural operations which were done chiefly by men. Wage discrimination among men and women was also an essential feature of the agricultural labour force.

### **1.1 Brief History of the Study Area**

Uttar Pradesh forms a major area of the Northern fertile plain or the Indo-Gangetic plain. It was known as ‘the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh’ and was referred as U.P. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the name given to the British possessions in the regions which came to comprise U.P. varied from time to time. “The Benares region was acquired in 1775 and the Ceded Conquered Provinces were acquired in 1801 and 1803. These ‘Ceded and Conquered Provinces’ were renamed the ‘Upper Provinces’ in 1809” (Reeves, 1991). In 1836, Benares and the Upper Provinces, together with later additions in Garhwal and Bundelkhand became the North-Western Provinces. After the annexation of Oudh (more correctly

‘Avadh’) in 1856, Oudh was separately administered by a Chief Commissioner until 1877 when the North-Western Provinces and Oudh were joined together under a single Lieutenant- Governor.

In 1902, following the formation of new province called the ‘North-West Frontier Province’, the NWP and Oudh was renamed the ‘United Provinces of Agra and Oudh’. Later in 1937, this was made simply the ‘United Provinces’ (ibid). The United Provinces was renamed as the state of Uttar Pradesh in Independent India after 1950.

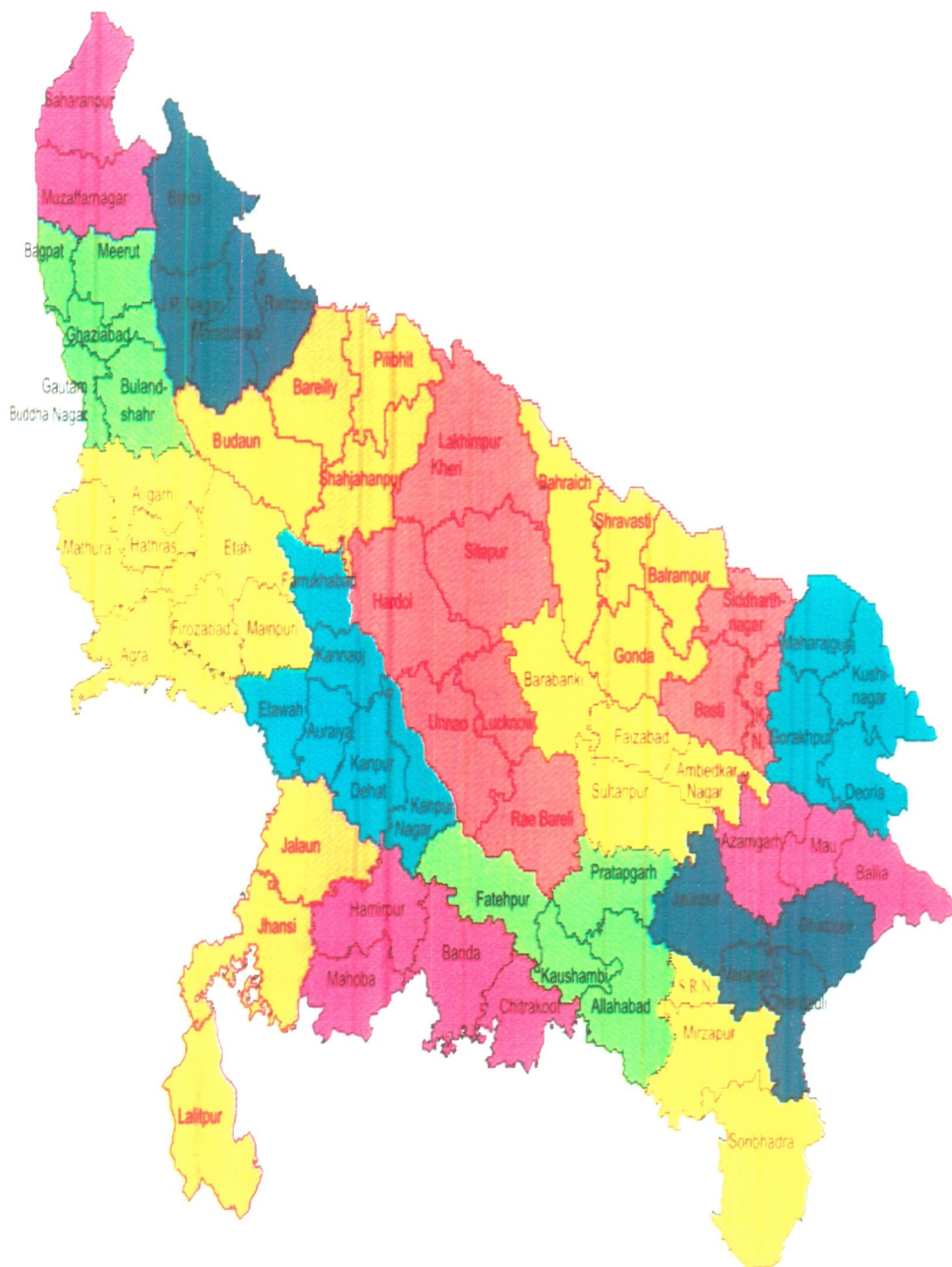
According to Census 1951 the state was divided into 51 districts and these districts were grouped into 10 revenue divisions as given below:

1. Meerut Division: Dehradun, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bulandshahr
2. Agra Division: Aligarh, Mathura, Agra, Mainpuri, Etah
3. Rohilkhand Division: Bareilly, Bijnor, Budaun, Muradabad, Shahjahanpur, Pilibhit, Rampur
4. Allahabad Division: Farrukhabad, Etawah, Kanpur, Fatehpur, Allahabad
5. Jhansi Division: Jhansi, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Banda
6. Banaras Division: Banaras, Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Ballia

7. Gorakhpur Division: Gorakhpur, Deoria, Basti, Azamgarh
8. Kumaun Division: Nanital, Almora, Garhwal, Tehri-Garhwal
9. Lucknow Division: Lucknow, Unnao, Rae Bareli, Sitapur, Hardoi, Kheri
10. Faizabad Division: Faizabad, Gonda, Bahraich, Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Bara Banki.

In 2001 Uttar Pradesh has 70 districts, after division of the State into Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. In fact, 20 new districts were created after 1991 Census before the formation of new State of Uttranchal. These new districts are Rudra Prayag, Bageshwar, Champawati, Udham Singh Nagar (All in Uttranchal) and Jyotiba Phule Nagar, Baghpat, Gautam Buddh Nagar, Hathras, Kannauj, Auraiya, Mahoba, Chitrakoot, Kaushambi, Ambedkarnagar, Shrawasti, Balrampur, Sant Kabir Nagar, Kushinagar, Chandauli and Sant Ravidas Nagar Bhadohi (All in Uttar Pradesh).

### Map1. District Map of Uttar Pradesh, 2001



## 1.2 Geography

Uttar Pradesh is bounded by Nepal in the North, Himachal Pradesh in the North West, Haryana in the west, Rajasthan in South West, Madhya Pradesh in South and South-West and Bihar in East. Situated between  $23^{\circ} 52' N$  and  $31^{\circ} 28' N$  latitudes and  $77^{\circ} 3'$  and  $84^{\circ} 39' E$  longitudes, this is the fourth largest state in the country. It occupies the central position in India and along with some other states like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, it is completely landlocked (Gazette, 1981).

Part of North Western Uttar Pradesh was formed into a new state Uttarakhand on November 9th 2000. The state is also divided into three geographical parts; the Himalayan region and some of the foothills areas in the north, the vast plain covering much of the state and the Vindhya Mountains in the South. Both in terms of geography and in political and administrative terms, U.P. could also be divided into five zones; the Western zone, which is comparatively well developed and better off than the rest in terms agriculture and industry. The Eastern zone is flooded and drought prone and therefore has slow pace of development, the Central zone and the hill region, which may emerge as a separate state from the rest of U.P. and the Bundelkhand region in the south close to Madhya Pradesh. The Gangetic Plain is mainly covered by Ganga, Yamuna and its



allied rivers- Ram Ganga, Gomti, Ghaghara and Gandhak. The entire plain is watered by these rivers which has made the soil alluvial and very fertile (Shukla, 2007).

### **1.3 Climate**

Uttar Pradesh has tropical monsoonal climate type with hot summers and cold winters. There are basically three distinct seasons: cold season from October to February, summer from March to mid-June and rainy season from June to September. In the plains, the climate is cool or cold from November to early March although the days are pleasant and often warm. After the middle of March it gets to be hot and in May the temperature could rise to 45 degree Celsius or even more in the plains. June is both hot and humid until the South-West monsoon sets in. The rainfall is more towards the eastern parts of U.P. and it goes on decreasing as one approach the Western parts.

### **1.4 Land-use Pattern**

Uttar Pradesh comprises 7.6 per cent of India's land, including 16.4 per cent of the country's area under food grain production and 12.33 per cent net area under cultivation. Almost 51 per cent of the land in Uttar Pradesh is used for cultivation and 74 per cent of the net cropped area is irrigated (GOI, 2007 a). Since the pressure of population in U.P. is very high as it comprise of 16.67 per cent of the national population. Therefore

most of the land holdings are small holdings i.e. from 1hectares to 2 hectares and marginal holdings comprising below 1 hectare of land. Though the state covers only 7 per cent of the geographical area of the country, it contributes about 23 per cent to national food grain production. Agriculture has a strong base in the state, and has the potential to feed major population of the country. Statistics shows that Uttar Pradesh is also the largest producer of wheat (25031 tonnes), sugarcane (133949 tonnes), potato (10248 tonnes) and third largest producer of rice (11124 tonnes) in the country (GOI, 2007 b).

### **1.5 Objectives and Hypothesis**

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To reconstruct the role of women in agriculture from pre-independence era.
2. To examine the factors that affects the participation of women in agriculture.
3. To examine the changes in agrarian structure brought about by the Zamindari Abolition Act and the subsequent land-ceiling legislations
4. To examine the effect of changes in landed property and inheritance laws on women's position.

5. To study gender based discrimination in agricultural wages.

Taking into consideration the above objectives, the following hypothesis were formulated for this study.

1. Women belonging to the lower caste actively participated in agriculture.
2. Women performed all the important farm operations in agriculture.
3. Modernization of agriculture adversely affected the women's participation in agriculture.
4. Land rights were not distributed equally among men and women.
5. Wage differential existed in male and female agricultural labourers.

### **1.6 Methodology and Limitations**

This study is based on various Gazetteers of Uttar Pradesh, Census Reports, Census data, Government reports, FAO documents and ILO reports. It also included the Duffrin's Report, 1890, various Wage Laws and Land Reform Acts, Agricultural Wages of India, National Sample Survey Reports, non-official surveys, and academic papers and books.

The limitation faced during the study was the unavailability of Census data for the year 1901 and 1941. Moreover, the information on women

agricultural workers in Pre-independence era in India was insufficient and scattered.

### **1. 7 Review of Literature**

Different writers have shown that women more than men are largely employed in the agriculture sector. Varma (1992), Tripathy (1996), Grover & Grover (2004) Nautiyal *et al.* (2009) and others found that Indian women were extensively involved in agricultural activities.

However Samanta (1995) found that although women took active part in agriculture but they did not benefit in the same way as men. The author also found that the women farmers faced lot of problems due to lack of education. Miller (1982) found marked variations in female agricultural labour participation in India. According to him these variations resulted from female seclusion and segregation which were practiced in north India, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh than in Southern states. Veiling in the northern regions was a highly visible symbol of female seclusion.

Immanuel (1998) found that in the three main rice growing States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, women made crucial contribution to the entire process of cultivation. He also included West Bengal as one of the states with highest involvement of women in agriculture. However Varma (1992) found the participation rate of women agricultural labourers in

Haryana to be above the national figure of women's work force. Krishnaraj and Shah (2004) also deviate from the distinction made that the southern regions showed a higher participation of women work force in rural areas than the North and North-West regions. The pattern was significantly different in states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, where the percentage of female workers engaged in agriculture was relatively higher. The reason behind this was due to the migration of male members of the households and higher incidence of commercialization. Jetley (1987) and Paris *et al.* (2005) also reported that in Uttar Pradesh during migration of male, women from nuclear households took over tasks which were traditionally done by men, particularly during land preparation and other tasks during the peak-cropping seasons. However, women faced certain hardships like labour shortage, lack of access to new seeds, new skills and knowledge on improved methods of rice farming.

Sridhara *et al.* (2009) stated that, in the backward and hilly regions there were more women than men engaged in agriculture, for example in Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttranchal. Punia (1991) and Kalpagam *et al.* (2004) also reported that in Uttar Pradesh the participation of females in the labour force was highest in the hills and lowest in the western plains. According to Pandya (2007), the

responsibility of agricultural production in hills rested on the shoulders of women because men generally migrated to cities in search of employment. Since farm mechanization was not possible in the hilly areas due to terraced land therefore farm women did the entire work manually.

Kaur (1987) also stated that in the tribal societies of Arunachal, Tripura, Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur, women were actively involved in farming. This was mainly because of the 'Jhumming cultivation', which is a form of shifting cultivation where women workers played an important role in agriculture.

It was found that not only in India but also in other developing countries women's participation in agriculture was greater than men. White *et al.* (1981) and Coontz and Henderson (1986) witnessed that in African continent there were a large number of female agricultural workers. According to them this was mainly because of the absence of plough cultivation. Schultz (1990) reported that women were largely employed in South and West Asia, followed by North Africa and East Asia whereas developed countries like Latin America had the lowest participation of women in agriculture. Burnettee (2004) also found that in England the involvement of women in agriculture reduced due to an

increased demand for women in factories and the changes in the methods of farming system.

In spite of the large participation of women in agriculture, women's work remained mostly invisible. One of the reasons behind this was the involvement of women in less skilled agricultural operations. According to Moser (1993) and Mahapatra (2006) there was gender division of labour in Indian agriculture. Chattopadhyay (1982) showed that agricultural tasks like weeding, transplanting and harvesting were exclusively done by women. These activities were always considered lighter forms of field work. Chun (1957), Srinivas (1977), Lebra *et al.* (1984), Chopra and Ghosh (2001) and Saksena (2004) also had similar views. According to Gopalan (1995) the work of women agricultural labourers was characterized as 'repetitive, monotonous and arduous'. The Gazetteers of Atkinson (1874) Brokeman, (1909) and Nevil (1907) reported that in Pre-Independent India women agricultural labourers in the United Provinces usually performed lighter form of field work.

Sen (1999) considered that the work carried out by men was always arduous in nature. However, according to Prakash (2003) the physical strength had nothing to do with the sexual division of labour. Once men and women had equal access to modern methods of farming then either sex would be equally efficient in performing all the

agricultural operations. Pandolfelli *et al.* (2007) believed that in gender division of labour women and men's role and responsibilities were separate but complementary to one another.

Since Pre-colonial period out of all the agricultural operations women were chiefly employed in few tasks. According to Moosvi (1994) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the field work that women did, included transplanting, weeding and helping in harvesting. Randhawa (1980) showed that ploughing was specifically done by males while the females followed the plough and dropped the seeds in the furrows. Crooke (1907) reported that in the rice districts of Punjab, the men ploughed the fields and planted the nurseries, while the women transplanted the seedlings. The Gazetteers of Atkinson (1874), Nevil (1907), Brokeman, (1909) and Walton (1910) also pointed out that in Uttar Pradesh the agricultural operations like sowing, weeding, cotton picking were exclusively done by women labourers and these tasks were considered as lighter form of field work.

According to Dixon (1982) in the developing countries the sex-related biases in labour force statistics led to the assumption that women's economic contribution in agricultural production was negligible. This wrong assumption resulted in exclusion of women from the access to crucial production inputs.



There were also studies which showed that except ploughing, women were performing almost all activities in agriculture. For instance Giriappa (1988) revealed in his study that the rural women participated in agricultural operations like manuring, land preparation, sowing, watering, weeding, harvesting, threshing, transporting, storage, processing, grading, carrying the produce and marketing. Similar findings have also been reported by Punia (1992), Jain (1985), Balakrishnan (2005) and Immanuel (1998).

Hansara and Dhillon (1995) studied that women played a significant role not only in crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro-social forestry and fisheries but also in non-farm operations along with their household. Similarly Jamali (2009) reported that women in Pakistan were major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Their work ranged from crop and livestock production to cottage industry.

Basically women of lower classes performed field work in agriculture. Landless women working as agricultural wage labourers were less bound to traditions which otherwise restricted women of higher classes. Varma (1992) found that community-wise women participation in agriculture was highest among tribes, followed by scheduled casts. Rout and Panda (2008) observed that in southern State like Tamil Nadu,

women agricultural labourers belonged to Scheduled castes and tribes. Lebra *et al.* (1984) also showed that a large proportion of agricultural labourers belonged to the socially disadvantaged castes, often referred as *Harijans*. According to Bennett (1992) in the patriarchal society women who worked on field and survived on wage employment were mostly those who belonged to the lower hierarchy. Jafri (1985) and Tyagi (1994) stated that, females belonging to the lower social hierarchy were always engaged in productive activities in order to supplement their family's income.

Lerche (1998) reported that in the higher classes a woman's physical presence in the public sphere was not accepted. Bagchi (1981) also reported that in Uttar Pradesh the rigid caste taboos like '*Purdah*' were responsible for restricting women's activities to the home environment which largely affected their participation in agriculture.

Singh and Singh (1992), Nayyar (1987), Row (1985) and Bagchi (1981) held the view that, various socio-cultural factors were responsible for women's invisibility in the agriculture sector. While Sethi (1982), was of the opinion that the role of caste and cultural factors resulted in low participation of female workers in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. According to Bhati and Singh (1987) the social traditions like *purdah* system did not favour women's work outside the boundaries of their

homes. Miller (1982) also gave strong evidence that *Purdah* was the most prevalent form of female seclusion in the world. It revolves around the physical segregation of females through the use of boundary makers such as curtains, veils, and walls. He also said that, it was closely associated with Muslim religious tradition in India, but the Hindus of North India also practiced a form of *purdah*. While, Boserup (1970) showed that seclusion of females was related to the economy and its demand for female labour. According to him seclusion was found in those areas and farming systems where female field labour was not required.

While Prabhakar (2004) showed that occupational immobility among women agricultural workers was caused by a variety of economic and social factors which included landlessness, lack of organization and inequality of status. Smyth *et al.* (1999) argued that women's invisibility was the result of their low status in the community. However, activities performed by women were valued less than men's work. A patriarchal society not only restricted women from working on field in India but also in other countries. Rothschild (1985) attributed women's invisibility in African agriculture to patriarchal values that rigidly sustained powerful male supremacy.

Apart from socio-economic factors the introduction of technology has also affected the participation of women in agriculture. According to

Singh (2006) and Sridhar *et al.* (2009) technology was not gender neutral. Therefore the introduction of new technology had a negative effect on the role of women. Gopalan (1995) stated that the agricultural implements were not designed according to the anthropometric rules and therefore it was physically inconvenient for women to handle almost all the equipments. Singh (2010) also felt that the technological need of women were different than men. Within rural societies, gender differences in needs and household production demands gave rise to diverse technology requirements. Ram (2004) stated that, improved agricultural technology also heightened the productivity gap between men and women. Men monopolized the use of new technology even though it required less muscular power.

Verma *et al.* (2006), Punia (1992) and Tripathy (1996) were of the opinion that fertilizers, pesticides and modern implements displaced women from the traditional activities and pushed them to less skilled jobs and as support agents rather than major handlers of equipment. Kaur (1988) showed that the degree of technological impact was different on women from different socio-economic strata. On one hand it freed women completely, who were working on their own farms and who belonged to the upper socio-economic strata. While on other it negatively affected those women who were from lower castes by reducing the

demand for labour employment during the peak season. A similar view was given by Duvvury (1989).

Agarwal (1984) examined the impact of technological change on women and men workers for three rice-growing regions, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. It was found that in all the three states the technology had a negative effect on the female labour. Similar results were found by Arunachalam and Kalpagam (2006) in Karataka. Panda (2008) also found that women agricultural labourers were displaced by men in areas where technology was introduced. Chattopadhyay (1982) showed that in those regions where cultivation was highly non-mechanized, female agricultural labourers were preferred by employers for certain operations.

Although most studies found that technology had adversely affected the work of women agricultural labourers, their views were criticized by Chand *et al.* (1985), who were of the opinion that modernization of agriculture in Punjab had resulted in increased employment per hectare of cultivated area for all kinds of female labour. Further Kalaimathi (1988) also said that ensuring technological change in agriculture increased women's welfare not only in terms of their employment but income, health and nutrition as well. As far as other counties are concerned Whyte and Whyte (1982) also showed that in

Korea and China the mechanization of agriculture had increased the participation of women workers.

Dash (2008) characterized farm women as illiterate, unskilled, less paid, ill-informed and ill-equipped to overcome socio-cultural barriers. Jamali (2009) also showed that in Pakistan majority of rural women in agriculture were uneducated, unskilled and tradition-bounded, therefore their productive capabilities were also low and they were counted as unskilled labourers.

Whyte and Whyte (1982) also believed that lower level of education among Asian women restricted them in learning new skills. Halim and Alam (1995) not only gave importance to education, but also emphasized agricultural research and extension for improving the plight of agricultural women workers in South-East Asia.

Rao and Kumari (2005) showed that in spite of the efforts of Central and State governments as well as of NGOs for more than 30 years, rural women had gained very little in terms of gender equity in the labour market. Various authors like Samanta (2005), Mishra (2002), Kaur (1988) had identified that training along with general level of education was an important tool for empowering women in agriculture.

Although women were found to be increasingly responsible for farm work, they were not perceived as 'farmers'. They did not own

agricultural land, which was one of the causes for the persistent gender inequalities in agriculture. According to Rausch (2011) men controlled the land and therefore the government training programmes were generally designed for the male farmers. Even the low interest agricultural loans were made available largely to male farmers. Kelkar (2011) reported that, if women were accepted as owners then they would be perceived as farmers. Also it was more likely that they would be targeted for training as farm managers and not merely as home managers. Garikipati (unpublished) suggested that owning agricultural land will significantly improve women's relative domestic power and provide better working conditions.

The need for land rights for agricultural women was highlighted by various authors. While Sen (1999) highlighted that land rights were very important for women whose men migrated in search of better employment opportunities. Agarwal (1994) gave four broad categories for the need for independent Land Rights for women, which included Welfare, Efficiency, Equality and Empowerment. Titling women with land rights in the absence of males could enhance agricultural productivity by increasing their access to credit, technology and information of improved agricultural practices.

According to Sridhar *et al.* (2009), agricultural land not only provided direct benefits in terms of crop output, trees, fodder, fuel and garden produce but, also indirect benefits such as collateral credit or an asset which could be sold when needed. Further, it was also reported by Agarwal (1998) that, the ownership of land also provided security and support to old widows from their family members. Vas (unpublished) revealed that women living in landless households were more prone to violence, starvation and discrimination. Smith (1999) described the importance of land as an asset whose productive capacity had enormous potential for wealth generation and those who controlled this asset had status and influence. Chand (unpublished) showed that just titling of land to women did not empower them but it was also important to ensure that the land records showed cultivation under women's name where they actually managed the farm.

As far as various Laws related to land rights were concerned, women were never considered the rightful owners of agricultural land. According to Kalpagam and Arunachalam (2008) and Chaturvedi (2002), the law in northern India, especially in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi did not permit women to own agricultural land. When the land owner died, the land was devolved only to male children and not to daughters. Mearns (1999) also stated that the social



obstacles restricted women in North India from having access to land rights. Ray (2005) also argued that due to lack of land rights in Uttar Pradesh, women were not regarded as farmers or as equal partners in the productive enterprises of farming households.

Some states amended the inheritance Laws and provided land rights to women. Cotula (2002) reported that Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerela had given agricultural land rights to women. Mishra (2006) and Bhatt (2008) also found that laws were amended to give land rights to women in Maharashtra, Gujrat and West Bengal. However, Mearns (1999) found that in Maharashtra, Gujrat and West Bengal women's ownership rights on agricultural land were only in name and they were not able to exercise effective control over land.

Various studies in other countries also found that women did not have equal rights in agricultural land. Gurney (1995) found that women in Latin American countries did not have equal access to land even where legislation had removed gender barriers to land ownership. He further found that even though the usufruct right to own agricultural land prevailed in Africa. Still women were essentially temporary custodians of land which was passed from father to the male heir. In contrast to India, the African women usually lost the rights to own agricultural land after the death of their husbands.

Singh (1996) revealed that the benefit of agricultural growth had not been equally distributed between male and female agricultural wage workers across the states, as there were a continuous wage rate differences. Farouq (1980) in his work on Bangladesh found that female labourers were given half of the wage of male labourers even though she worked for a full day.

Krishnamurty (1988) found that wage differences among agricultural labourers were due to sex rather than caste. Acharya and Panwalkar (1988), who examined gender wage gap, found that it had originated from allocation of work among men and women, for example ploughing, a high wage work which was always done by men.

Sridhara *et al.* (2009) revealed that throughout South Asia, women's wages were less than those given to men. They further showed that the inequality in the wage structure was particularly marked in Pakistan where women received, on an average, just about one-third of the wages paid to men. While in India the wage differential were as high as 38 per cent. The Maldives and Nepal had least disparity in the wage structure, but there too women did not receive more than 60 per cent of the wages paid to men. Stoeckel and Sirisena (1988) reported that in Sri Lanka, women earned 14 to 39 per cent less than men in the same agricultural activities.

A study conducted by Rani *et al.* (1990) in Andhra Pradesh showed that in the rice and cotton based cropping system, wage differences were observed among males and females for different operations. According to Jayashanker and Narayana (1983) the minimum wages Act for agricultural labourers had not yet been implemented properly. The report of GOI (1974) showed that the machinery for fixation and enforcement of minimum wages was not uniform. The casual nature of women's employment, poverty and illiteracy among agricultural labourers and their ignorance of the law were the reasons that forced women to receive inadequate wages. It was also found that not only in the agriculture sector but in industries too women earned less than men. Ornati (1955) showed that in India and in the rest of the world women earned less than men because most of the women workers in the industry were unskilled and their number was relatively small. Thus they lacked bargaining power.

Various authors made recommendations for improving the plight of rural women in agriculture. Bagchi (1981) suggested that in case of the restrictive communities where women were restricted from working on other's fields, schemes or activities that could be carried out closer to the home situation could provide opportunities to rural women. These activities ranged from income generation to supervisory which in turn could contribute to the village community.

Sharma and Singh (1992) recommended that, for improving the plight of unskilled female agricultural workers, education, employment and creation of income earning opportunities should be given top priorities.

Saksena (2004) suggested that, along with employment generation schemes for agricultural women, there was a need to upgrade women's skills in farming practices like horticulture and floriculture. However Reddy (1979) believed that the welfare of rural female agricultural workers lay not in the conventional policy of creating additional employment but in easing their work burden. According to Farouq (1980) education and non-farm employment opportunities may help women for better livelihood.

In providing adequate wages to women agricultural labourers two important Acts were the Minimum wages Act 1948 and The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. Various authors suggested that these acts should be properly implemented in providing sufficient wages to both men and women, without any discrimination. Rani *et al.* (1990) the authors suggested that the Equal Remuneration Act should be strictly implemented for similar work performed by men and women. Stoeckel and Sirisena (1988) emphasized on having a policy for eliminating wage inequality between the sexes.

## 1.8 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis has been divided into six chapters.

**Chapter 1** gives a general background of the gender issues in agriculture. it also consist the background of the study area and also reviews literature on women's involvement in agriculture in broader perspective.

**Chapter 2** deals with the historical review of women's participation in Uttar Pradesh which was known as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh from 1881 to 1951. It shows the various agricultural operations performed by women during this period. It also shows the socio-economic profile of women agricultural workers.

**Chapter 3** deals with factors that affect the participation of women agricultural workers since 1951. There existed various social and economic constrains which negatively affected the participation of women. Technological constraints also forced women into low skilled operations. Women in agriculture also faced various problems that created adverse conditions for them.

**Chapter 4** deals with the changes in the land legislations and the women's position in agriculture. Although women are greatly employed in agriculture but in the absence of land rights they could not use the resources. This chapter critically examines various tenancy Acts along

with inheritance laws that restricted women's independent ownership of agricultural land.

**Chapter 5** deals with the gender disparities in the agricultural wages. Furthermore it deals with the various wage laws that claim to provide equal wages to both men and women. The agricultural wages were also looked upon to examine regional and inter state disparities among women labourers.

**Chapter 6** gives the conclusion and also recommended various measures that may help in improving the status of women agricultural workers.

## Chapter II

# *Historical Review of Women Field Labourers in Uttar Pradesh during 1881-1951*

## **HISTORICAL REVIEW OF WOMEN FIELD LABOURERS IN UTTAR PRADESH DURING 1881 - 1951**

Women, as a class have always played a pivotal role in the process of economic development. In the rural economy women were mostly viewed as the ones who supplemented their family incomes by helping men on agricultural fields and at the same time carrying out household responsibilities. At household level women's roles were complex and diverse. The responsibilities of looking after children and elderly persons, managing the family, attending to the household chores and earning a livelihood for the family, have made their life distinct and challenging.

In Uttar Pradesh, caste played an important role in deciding the status of a woman in a family. It was found that women of the upper castes were highly restricted from moving out of the boundaries of their household. The seclusion of women was prevalent among Hindus and the Muslims. According to Duffrin (1890) "A Brahman or a *Thakur* lady would never go out of the harem to assist her husband or son in the field, nor will do any work outside the four walls of her *zanana*". The Muslim cultivators also kept their women in *purdah* and in order to maintain the dignity of the family, women were restricted from moving out for work. The only work she would do was spinning thread inside her house.

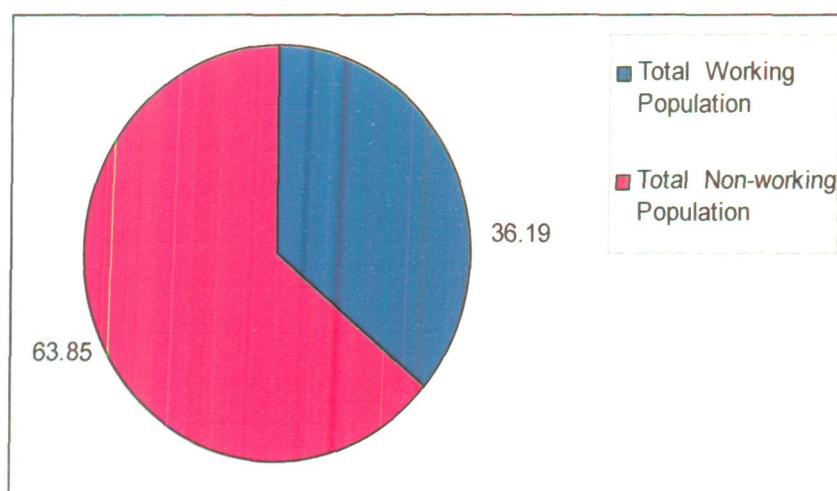


While the ladies in the landowner's family spent their time in cooking and supervising the kitchen (Jafri, 1985). The custom of *purdah* was also common among the high caste Hindus. Due to which, the women belonging to the *Brahmana* and *Ksatriya* castes were not generally concerned with any type of economic activities (Tyagi, 1994). Generally women did not work in the agricultural fields, but only those who belonged to the lower caste worked as agricultural labourers. A major portion of women in agriculture comprised of day labourers. They were assigned menial tasks and particularly those tasks in agriculture which required lot of energy.

Traditionally women belonging to low castes like *Chamar*, *Passi*, *Dhobi* and *Koris* provided agricultural labour and other services. These were by and large landless peasants. Women of the *Chamar* or other lower caste agriculturists worked together with their male family members (Duffrein, 1890). There were two more castes mentioned by Jafri (1985) i.e. *Kachhis* and *Kurmis* whose women worked in the agricultural fields. Women of the poor peasant households assisted their men in the fields.

Females belonging to the lower social hierarchy were mostly engaged in productive activities in order to supplement their family income. These women usually worked in pastures and fields and therefore worked independently for their family needs. During 1881 the total female population of U.P was 21,195,313, out of which 63.85 per cent had no occupation of their own; these were employed chiefly in the domestic work of their families (fig.1).

**Figure 1. Total Working and Non-working Female Population of U.P. in 1881**

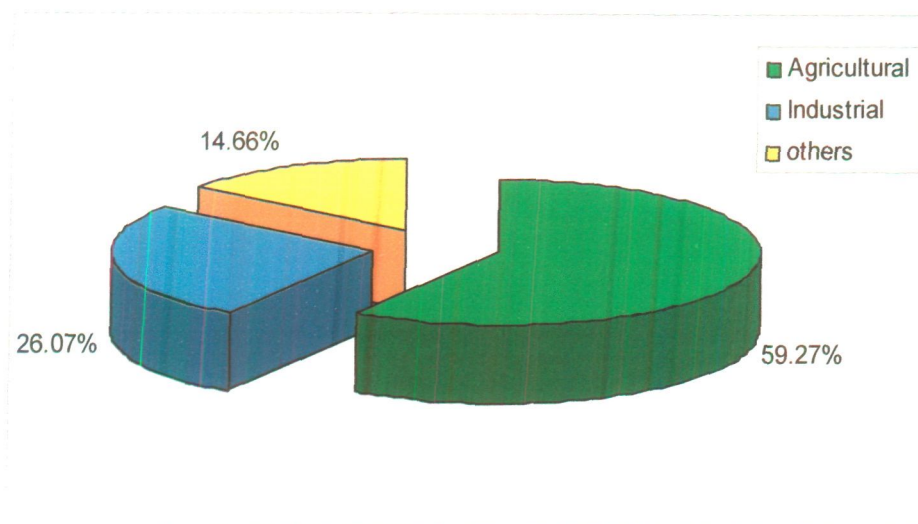


Source: Report of the Census of the N.-W. P. And Oudh, 1881, p. 103.

While the remaining 36.19 per cent were those women who assisted their husband's occupations, or earned their own living by some special employment. Of these working women, 59.27 per cent fall into the agricultural class (Fig 2). This constituted mainly 37.99 per cent cultivating tenants, 17.89 per cent agricultural labourers and 2.85 per cent

landholders (Census, 1881). In U. P., the number of women agricultural labourers was less than the total cultivators because of the fact that the agricultural holdings were so small that they were looked after by the members of the cultivating owners, and no outside labour was necessary (Jafri, 1985).

**Figure 2. Distribution of Female Workers in Different Employments in 1881**



Source: *ibid*

Note: Other classes included, domestic class (0.82%), professional class (0.85%), Commercial class (0.22%), and Indefinite class (12.77%).

Women of the cultivating families assisted in agricultural business, where they watered the fields, sowed the seeds and also performed household duties. According to Duffrin (1890) the conditions of the labouring classes were distinctly worse. Labourers were less permanent than cultivators; they had less credit and did not get loans easily. In the slack season when there was lesser work, they had no cattle to sell and

little stock of grains to survive. Women of the labouring classes used to help their husbands by selling grass for 1 ½ *annas* a day. They hardly had enough to eat, sometimes women collected *saag* (leafy vegetables) which was boiled along with a small quantity of flour.

The laboureres earned well only during the harvesting season, when there was a demand for labour. The participation of women in the workforce also depended upon the economic wellbeing of the family. Among rich cultivators women were never allowed to work outside their homes. It was found that field labour was not women's main occupation in all the classes. They were compelled to work only when the family faced economic crises or if the male family members fell ill or became incapable of working on the fields. For instance, in the Agra Division, the wife of an agricultural labourer was compelled to work on fields when her husband became physically incapable to work. Lord Duffrin (1890) also mentioned other cases where women were forced to work for field labour, if the husband passed away or fell sick. Women of the small cultivating classes also worked when their stock of grains got exhausted and the men migrated in search for daily labour (*ibid*).

Migration of male labourers was usually seasonal as they returned back to their fields when the crops became ready for harvesting. In the absence of the male members the responsibility of the family and the

outside work directly fell on the women's shoulders. Since women were mostly employed in low paid work in agriculture therefore it was very difficult for women agricultural workers to survive during hard times.

Once employed in field labour there was a distinction between the work performed by women and men. Women by nature were considered a weaker sex than man. In agriculture they were given those tasks which were more manual and repetitive in nature, such as weeding, transplanting, harvesting, sowing, etc. All these tasks were also remunerated with the lowest rate and were considered menial.

## **2.1 Agricultural Operations**

Since the Vedic period the laborious functions of yoking the bullocks to the plough, driving them to the field, tilling the land, mixing the soil with the manure, sowing the seeds, guarding the crops for days and nights, harvesting the crop, winnowing out the grains and taking them home for storage were undertaken by the farmer himself. He was assisted by all the members of the family which included the women and children. Hence women were always seen as assisting their males on fields.

Women were never seen as a farmer or held high as a cultivator. In Gorakhpur district of U.P., a cultivator was always seen as a person who

was a man and who worked hard to till the land. This could be seen in one of the agricultural saying which stated that,

*“Mangsar kahe kisan ho ja mardaana,  
Teri paki aai Kharif ise jan gawana,  
Khene jugta rakh tu ghar mein tiyai,  
Rakhte ko de bech tayyar jab baki kiyai,  
Kar genhun mein dene ki taiyari,  
Yeh mahnat ka wakt hai tere bhari”.*

The Cultivator Mangsar says, “now be a man! Your autumn crop is ripe. Now is the time to harvest it and keep as much as is required for food in your household. Sell the rest and prepare to pay the rent. Now prepare to give the first light watering to your wheat fields. This is the time when you must work hard” (Amin and Crook, 2005). This saying showed that a cultivator was viewed as a man, who was responsible for watering the fields, harvesting the crops and selling it in the market and paying the rent. This indicated that all the important tasks of farming were carried out by the men. In the saying, there was no reference given for the work done by women.

In agriculture, ploughing was considered as the most skillful operation and was predominantly done by male agricultural labourers. The plough was held in very high esteem and was regarded as an auspicious article. Of all farm labourers the ploughman was paid well

enough (Duffrein, 1890). Women being considered inferior to men were not allowed to use the plough. But in spite of this, women performed almost all agricultural operations, from tilling of land, to sowing of seeds or transplanting, watering the fields, manuring, harvesting, threshing and winnowing. Women worked along with their men folk in order to augment the needs of the family. All the menial operations in agriculture were performed by women. In the hilly district of Garhwal women agricultural labourers were held in very low esteem. They nearly did all the field work except the actual ploughing. They sow, weed and reap, and between harvests were employed for carrying fuel and fodder from the neighboring hills (Walton, 1910).

## 2.2 Pre-Harvesting Operations

**Weeding:** In agriculture women were largely employed in all kinds of field labour, not excluding the more arduous kinds, but chiefly in weeding and cutting (Atkinson, 1874). Weeds and grasses were collected by women out of the ploughed fields. Deep weeding was known as *gorab* and the superficial weeding was known as *nikāi*, *nirāi*, or *nirwāi*. The tasks of weeding (*nirai*) and hoeing (*kodai*) were chiefly performed by women along with men. The excellence at this work of *Kurmi* women was proverbial-

*“Bhali jat Kunbin ki; khurpi hath*

*Khet nirawe apne pi ke sath. ”*  
*“Good blood the Kunbin’s who with spud in hand*  
*Beside her husband weeds the grateful land”.*

The spud (*khurpi*) was the usual instrument of weeding. While hoeing was generally done by men armed with large hoes (*kasi*) (Atkinson, 1879). Extensive weeding is required for the *Kharif* crops, because weeds grew in abundance during rains. Weeding was normally done twice or thrice in the months of July, August and September. In the Gorakhpur and other eastern districts, weeding was carried out before the fields were ploughed (Amin and Crook, 2005). Most of the hand weeding was done by women. Men usually performed those weeding operations for which bullock power had to be used for example the weeding between the rows of standing crops.

The most valuable *Kharif* crop was cotton. The crop required ploughing only once or twice and needed more weeding. Hence cotton was entirely weeded by women (Brockman, 1909). Weeding of cotton was done by hands. The weeding operations were carried in the midst of hot weather in the fields, there was no shade and the task was done in a squatting position. These tasks were not easy but they were considered as lighter form of field work and were performed entirely by women (Nevill, 1907 c). In Bareilly district, during the month of June and July, women



visited the north or east of the fields, where they picked a few of the largest pods, and hung them by their fiber to the tallest visible stalk (*bhogaldai*). They then squatted round the stalk, and filled their mouths with parched rice and puffed it out over the field. The parched rice was scattered across the same field when the crop flowered. The object behind was said to be that the cotton must swell out like the rice (Atkinson, 1879).

**Transplanting:** In rice farming, the men ploughed and planted the nurseries whereas women transplanted the seedlings in the mud. The transplantation of rice was known as *dibbling*, it was done by both men and women. Two to six plants were dibbled together, and a space of five or six inches was left between each of the clumps known as *bán* (Beckett, 1864). Transplanting rice was the hardest work done by women. It was done in the midst of fields filled with water and in extreme heat of the sun. The women had to bend continuously to do the planting, sometimes leading to spinal problems (Crooke, 1907).

**Sowing:** Sowing of crops was also performed by women (Walton, 1910). In furrow sowing women used to carry baskets filled with seeds and dropped the seeds into the furrow. In most states in India, even now, whereas ploughing is done by men it is the women who follow the plough

and drop the seeds in the furrows (Randhwa, 1980).

**Irrigation:** Women also participated actively in irrigating the fields. Although the number was not large but there are evidences which showed participation of women in various types of irrigation.

**Pur Irrigation:** Illustration 1 shows the working of *pur* Irrigation where only three labourers were required; one labour to drive the pair of bullocks which draws up the bucket, another to empty the bucket at the top of the well, and the third to distribute the water in the field.

**Illustration 1**



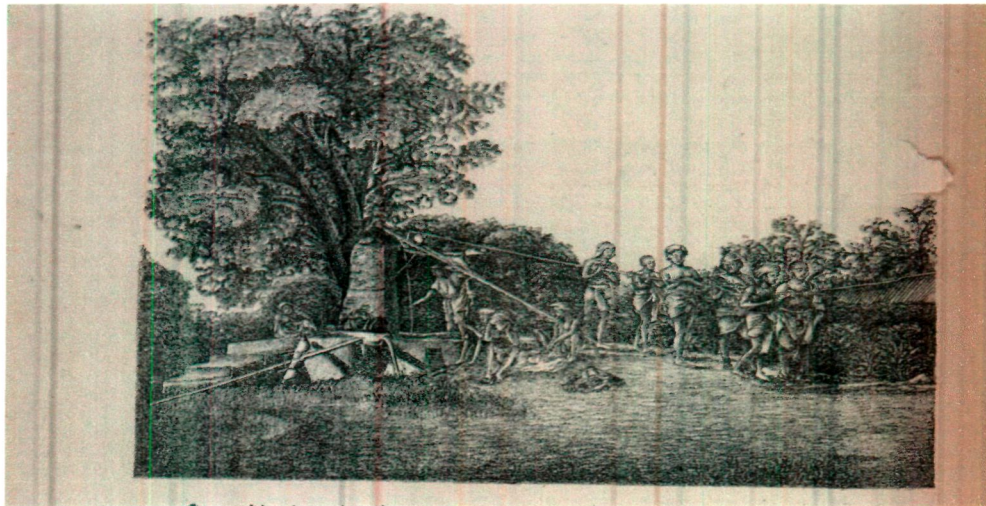
Source: Beckett, J. O. B. (1864). Settlement Report, Garhwal, Banda and Azamgarh District, 1856-64, p. 105.

Women were sometimes employed in *gharra* and *Púr* irrigation, both for drawing the bucket filled with water and emptying it at the well-head. In *pur* irrigation women were seldom employed, except at the well-head to empty the bucket (Beckett, 1856). Jafri (1985) in his work on United Provinces also founded that in the *pur* irrigation, the labourer who

pulled the *pur* was generally a woman and for which she used to get three and half *annas* per day.

**Gharra Irrigation:** in the *gharra* irrigation six labourers were required to pull the *gharra*, and three more labourers were used as a relief party in order to keep the drawing steady for the whole day. One man always stood at the top of the well to empty the bucket, and another was needed to distribute the water in the field. Illustration 2 shows that women were also employed in *gharra* irrigation, both for drawing the bucket and emptying it at the well head.

**Illustration 2**



Source: *ibid*, p. 104

**Charkhi Irrigation:** In *Charkhi* irrigation a broad open pulley, which was something like the wooden wheel, was used. The labourer stood on a plank over the well, forced down one end of the rope and brought up the other with the vessel filled with water (*ibid*). Illustration 3 shows the



working of *Charkhi* irrigation. The picture also shows a woman sitting in a squatting posture and doing her work at the well. Women were not frequently employed in either lever or pulley irrigation because the work became more mechanical by the use of pulley.

### Illustration 3

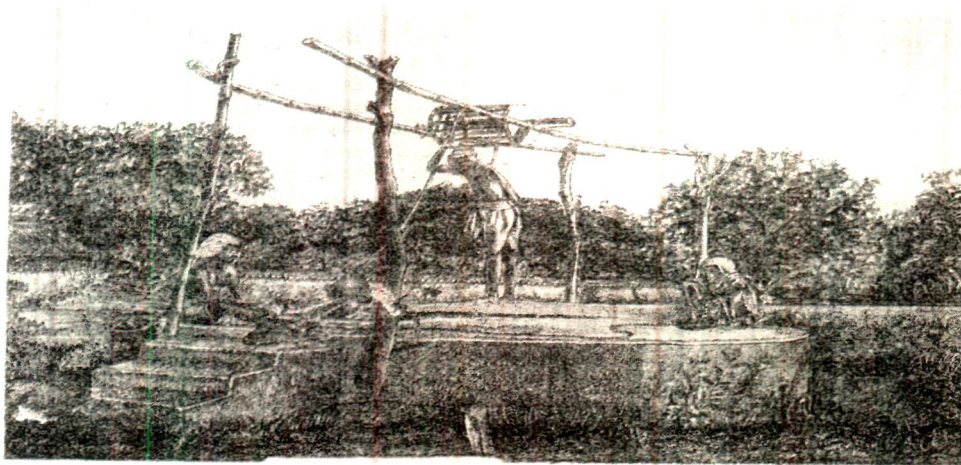


Illustration XV: *Charkhi* Irrigation

Source: *ibid*, p. 106

***Dhenkul* Irrigation:** *Dhenkul* is a type of lever irrigation. It consisted of a long pole, with a lump of mud stuck as a weight on the thicker end. A rope was attached to the other end on which an earthen pot was hanged. The pole was set upon a strong support, where one end was fixed in the ground at the distance of foot from the well. Illustration 4 shows a labourer pulling down the lever by the rope.

The pot was then lowered through the space into the well. And after filling the water he would then empty it into the water course at the top of the well. Since it was also lever irrigation, women were not seen at

the well top to fetch the water. Although a woman sitting in a squatting position is also seen in this picture. Women sometimes were not actively involved in the irrigation process but they were always seen assisting the men in some way or the other.

#### Illustration 4

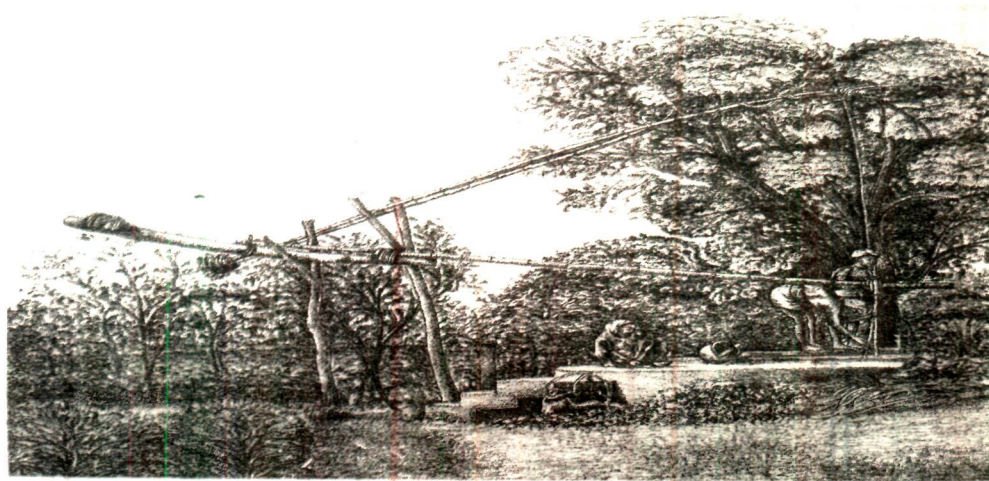


Illustration XIV: *Dhénkul* Irrigation

Source: *ibid.*, p. 106

### 2.3 Harvesting and Post-Harvesting Operations

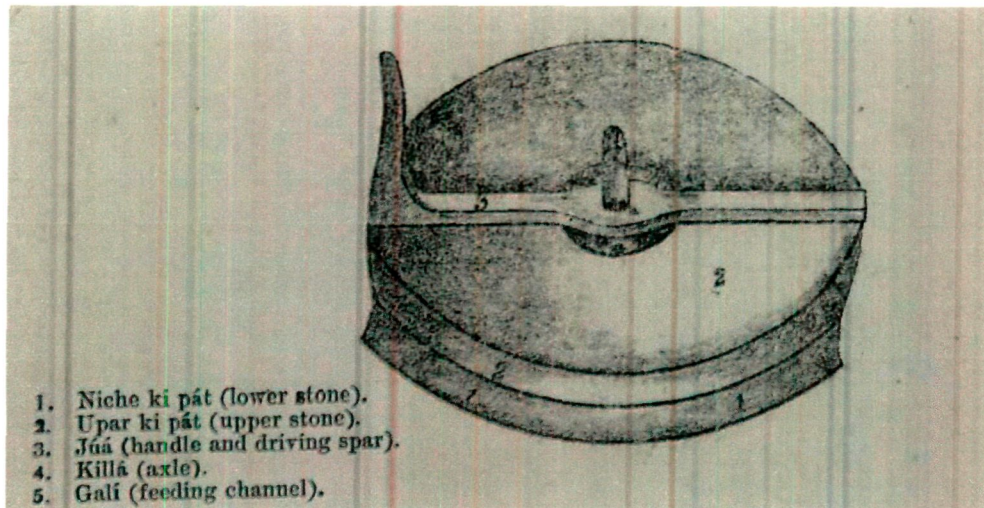
Reaping was also known as *lahi* and the reaper was called as *lehra* (Atkinson, 1879). The women carried huge bundles of reaped crop over their head and walked long distances. The entire harvesting operation in rice and wheat cultivation was a joint venture calling for a full day's labour.

Women also performed other agricultural operations such as threshing, winnowing, tending cattle, tending sugar-mills, preparing the



soil for the coming harvest, etc. “The unhusked grain was shelled chiefly by the women” (*ibid*). Women’s most laborious work was that of husking and grinding grain. The rice was cleaned in a wooden mortar, which was pounded with a heavy pestle.

### Illustration 5



Source: Beckett, J. O. B. (1864). Settlement Report, Garhwal, Banda and Azamgarh District. 1856-64, p. 117

The women belonging to less affluent and low caste families used to grind the grain to turn it into flour. There was always a stone mortar in which the grain was pounded with a heavy club which had a ring of iron at one end (Illustration 5). Grinding flour was much more tiresome and was done before sunrise. While working on the grinding mill, they had to lean forward in a strained position. These women worked with good will and were often heard singing songs. According to Jafri (1985), such songs were called ‘the Song of the Mill’.

*“This song may be heard at early dawn,*

*Mid the sound of the whirling wheel.  
When golden clouds tinge the eastern sky,  
And shadows homewards steal.  
T is sung by matron and by maid,  
As the heavy stone goes round,  
The noise of crushing grinding corn,  
By their voices almost drowned”.*

Women also added to the family income, by collecting the harvested crops. Some of them earned wages in grain by rendering menial services in the houses of the landowners and upper tenant classes, where they were engaged in drawing water, making cow dung cakes for fuel and manure. Since agricultural work was seasonal, most of the times female labourers worked as casual labourers.

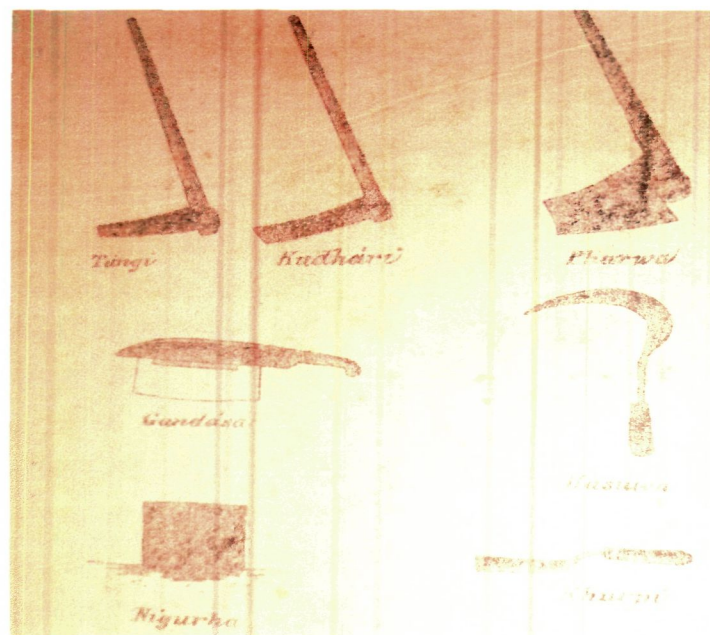
Women also helped others by digging grass and collected firewood for sale. “They assisted in gathering fuel, or watching fields, or carrying loads, or herding cattle” (Duffrein, 1890). They carried food for their men who worked on the fields and also gathered *saag* (green vegetables) from the fields and cooked it.

## **2.4 Agricultural Implements**

For agricultural operations the tools used by men and women were very simple. Illustration 6 shows the different implements used by men

and women for agriculture in the Allahabad region. The tools used for hoeing and weeding were the *kasi* and *phaora* (spade hoe), the *khurpi*, a spud or scraper was used for scratching grass and weeding (Atkinson, 1879). According to Jafri (1985) a *khurpa* or a small hand hoe was generally used by girls in the weeding operations. The instrument was also used for loosening the earth round the roots of plants; for this last operation the *kudar*, a kind of sharp pointed axe was generally employed. The *hansya* or sickle was mostly used to cut the crops. In Allahabad region the *gandasa*, which was better known as *garansi* or *garrasi*, was used for chopping sugar-cane and fodder. The *khudari*, an adze- shaped implement, and the *tangi*, a kind of hatchet were generally used. The *pharwa* or *phaora*, or a large hoe was commonly used by men.

### Illustration 6



Source: Atkinson, E. T. (1879). Statistical Descriptive and historical account of the north-western provinces of India, vol. 5. Government press, Allahabad., p. 544



## 2.5 Wages

Since 1882 the agricultural labourers were estimated to receive wages in kind and cash. In cash the wages included rupee, *annas* and *pice*, while in kind they were paid in *sers* of coarse grains. According to Nevill (1907, b) in Ballia district the wages of agricultural labourers for ploughing and sowing were  $2 \frac{1}{2}$  *sers*, or half *annas*. The wages for weeding and watering was  $1 \frac{1}{4}$  *sers*. For digging and thrashing the rate was  $1 \frac{7}{8}$  *sers* or  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  *annas*. While for reaping the labourers obtained one bundle in 16, which was approximately  $6 \frac{1}{4}$  *sers* of grain or five *annas* in the day. Women were more extensively employed in the lighter forms of field work such as weeding and watering, received only two-thirds of a man's wage. Wage discrimination was seen as the women were paid less than men for the same nature of work.

The women were largely employed in field labour but their work was considered less skilled and simple. According to Atkinson (1874), in the Hamirpur district women casual labourers who worked on fields received lesser wages than men. During the sowing and reaping seasons the men used to get money or its equivalent in grain to the amount of seven or eight *pice*, while women received only six *pice* per diem. During the rains men received six *pice* for weeding, whereas women received only four *pice*. During the harvest time the women were paid in kind.

They got two *seers* of grain and a bundle of reaped crop. Whereas the men use to get four *seers* of grain and a bundle of crop for which they were hired for harvesting.

During 1873 the women were largely employed in harvesting operations and received half *anna* to one *anna* a day or its equivalent in grain (*ibid*). According to Nevill (1922) the largest wage-earning class was that of the agricultural labourers and the payment in grain was made, so that the wage rate remained unaffected by the value of the amount received. Still whether payment was made in kind or cash the women agricultural labourers suffered with wage differentiation. Brockman (1911) also stated that, although women were most commonly employed in manual labour such as earthwork and weeding, they were remunerated at a smaller rate than the men. Sometimes the men received wages in cash along with food for a day, while women were not provided with food since there was a notion that she cooked the food for the household.

In Bareilly district the rate of remuneration for women for the task of weeding and hoeing was three quarters of an *anna* and food, or one *anna* in all. For men the wage was one *anna* a day and food (Atkinson, 1879). Although the rates of wages in agriculture for field labour increased during 1860's to 1880's, still the women labourers were paid less. "In 1860's the wages of agricultural and general labourers increased

from one *anna* to one *anna* three *pice* per day, while in 1872 the rate had risen to one *anna* six *pice* or two *annas*” (Nevill, 1907a).

However in 1881 women’s wages remained at one and a half to two *annas*. Hence the economic condition of the farm women in agriculture was worst. Women agricultural labourers were relatively poor, mal-nourished, weak decision makers and economically less organized.

The village women rarely had any bedding of their own and most of them passed their nights in their day clothes. In such conditions the women agricultural labourers of poor households had to live a very tough life. There were evidences which showed that women of the lower classes were insufficiently clad during the winters. Women were malnourished as most of the times they remained empty stomach. It was assumed that an adult working male’s health was required in order to supplement the needs of the rest of the family (Duffrein, 1890).

## **2.6 Women’s Participation in Agriculture**

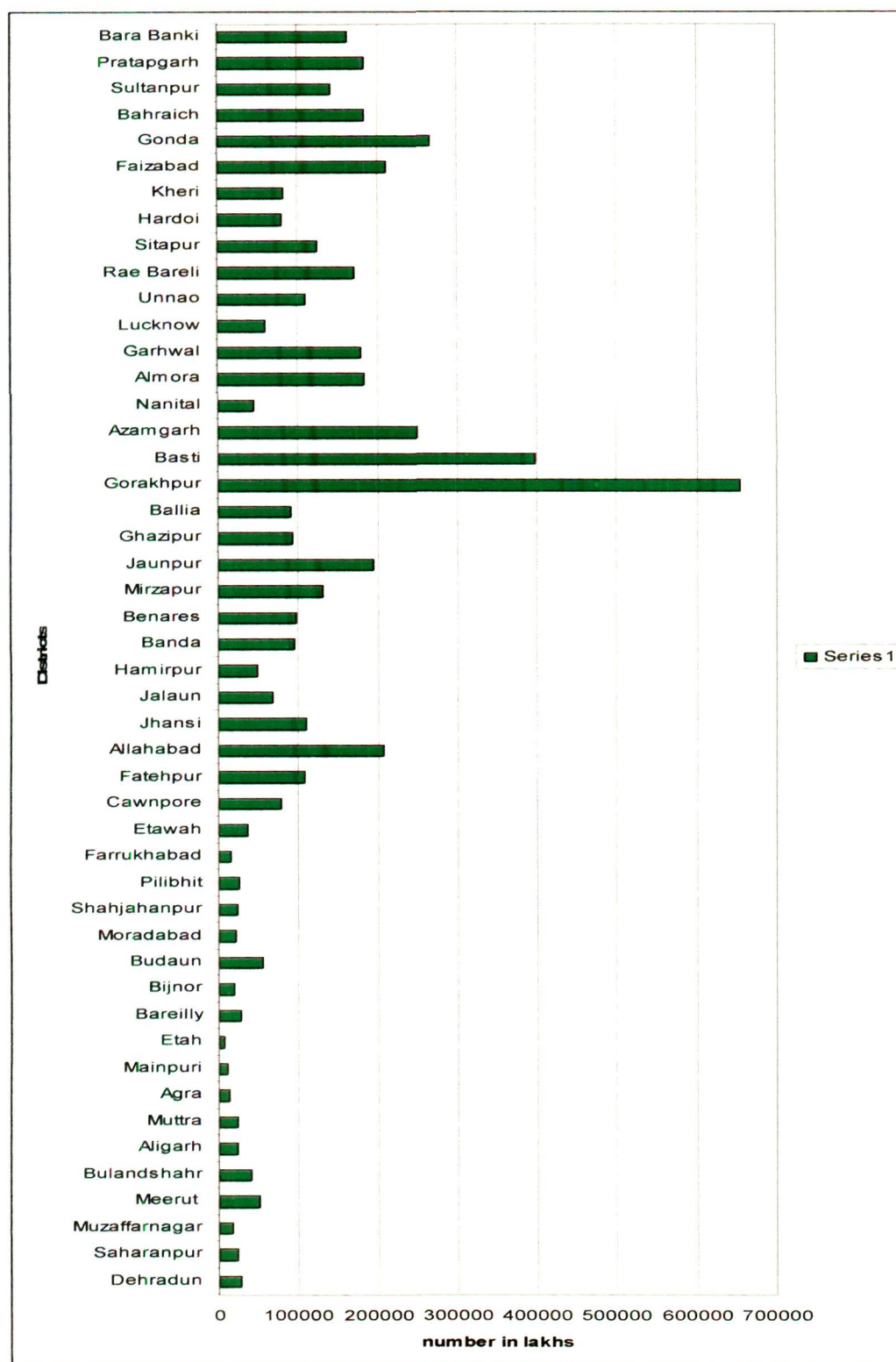
The North-Western Provinces and Oudh was essentially an agricultural state. But the participation of females in agriculture depended mostly on the level of socio-economic factors. According to the Census Report (1931, a) women in the Western Himalayas were largely employed in the agriculture sector. Their level of participation was much

higher than that of males. One of the reasons behind this was that there was no *purdah* system in this region. Due to which women were not restricted to work outside on the agricultural fields. Another reason was that most of the times the head of the family remained away from home in search of better employment. Therefore the family cultivation was carried entirely by the women and children were left alone at home.

In the Western Indo-Gangetic region there was low participation of women in the agriculture sector. As these areas were dominated by high castes and higher branches of other castes whose women either did not do any work apart from housekeeping or sometimes the heads of the families did not disclose the fact that their women worked, for the sake of respectability.

In the Indo-Gangetic, Central and Eastern regions the number of women workers was higher. Moreover the number of women working in cultivation was higher in the Eastern plains than the Central plains. In the Eastern plains also, the influence of temporary migration was noticed in Jaunpur and Ghazipur districts. In these districts seasonal migration took place into the jute mills of West Bengal fields (Nevil, 1908; Nevil, 1909). Men migrated in neighboring states for regular income as work in agriculture was seasonal. They came back in harvesting season, when the crop was ready.

**Figure 3. Distribution of Female Agricultural Workers in U.P., 1931**



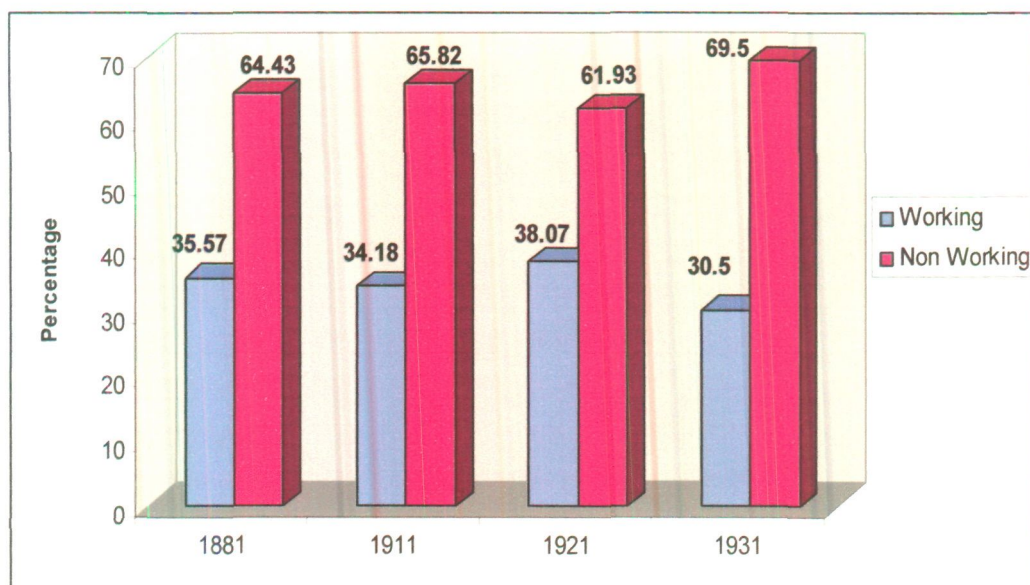
Source: Census of India (1931, b) United Provinces of Agra & Oudh, Volume XVIII, Part II – Imperial and Provincial Tables.

Among all the districts of U.P. the Gorakhpur district which lies in the Eastern Sub-Himalayan region had the highest participation of females in agricultural sector (Fig.3). Lowest participation of women was found in the Etah district which lies in the Western Indo-Gangetic region.

Although U.P. was an extensively agricultural state and women were actively involved in farming, still there was a large section of females that were not employed in the active labour force.

During the Pre-Independence period the total number of female working population was much less than the number of non-working population (Fig 4).

**Figure 4. Percentage of Working and Non-Working Female Population during 1881 to 1931**



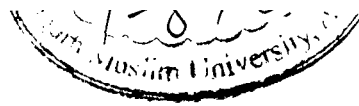
Source: For 1881 percentage was calculated from data available in Census Report of the N.-W. P. And Oudh, 1881.

For 1911, 1921 & 1931 percentage was calculated from the values given in Census of India (1931, a) United Provinces of Agra & Oudh, Vol. XVIII, Part 1-Report, Allahabad, 410.

The available data from Census 1881, 1911, 1921 and 1931 showed that large proportion of females remained out of the work force and were involved only in domestic responsibilities of the household. The Census did not involve the domestic work under the main head of working population. Those women who were engaged in domestic duties like cooking, grinding of grain, drawing water from wells and taking food to their families in the fields were always shown as unemployed and therefore were never classified as workers (Census, 1921).

The concentration of women largely in domestic work was because of the fact that social obligations restricted women's movement outside their homes. According to the Census Report (1931, a) it was certainly regarded as socially respectable for a wife to be engaged at home in household duties instead of working in the fields. The caste system also played an important role in reducing women's participation in the workforce. Due to higher social standing in the upper castes women were usually kept at home.

Women's participation in the agricultural sector was more in the lower castes. But in these castes also the economic condition of the family decided whether it was necessary to send the females to work in the fields or not. Moreover a continuous rise in the percentage of the non-working population was seen from 1881 to 1911 (Fig 4). But during 1921



the number of non-workers dropped to 61.93 per cent and the working population rose to 38.07 per cent which was higher than the previous census.

According to the Census report (1931, a) the increase in female work force was due to the rise in cost of living and heavy mortality caused by influenza during 1921. These two factors necessitated for every available woman to lend a hand in the fields and supplement the family's income. The increase took place solely in the agricultural sector. Later in 1931, on the return to more normal conditions the population also increased. And there was a decline in female working population from 38.07 per cent in 1921 to 30.5 per cent (1931) (Fig 4). But with this the number of non-working population also increased again from 61.93 per cent in 1921 to 69.5 per cent. This showed that in normal circumstances women were always preferred to stay at home however during the crisis they worked in the agricultural fields. Therefore women agricultural workers were less permanent and faced lot of hardships in the workforce.

In 1940's women were again found mostly doing agricultural operations. According to the Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee (1948) the cultivation of land was a common task which was generally performed by women workers. But precise information about later developments in the participation of women work



force was not available as occupations were not classified in the 1941 census.

Later the Census Report (1951) showed that, women of the lower castes usually worked either for separate wages or at the family occupation. In the rural areas women usually participated in the family cultivation. There was a sharp fall in the proportion of female workers. It was 514 per 1000 males in 1921, 423 in 1931 and 374 in 1951. In 1951 the participation of women in family occupations, especially in agriculture declined because of the prevailing under-employment.

Social barriers like *purdah* also restricted women's movement outside their homes. Where *purdah* was observed by women they could not as a rule do much to augment family incomes and even if they worked their work remained hidden from the enumerators.

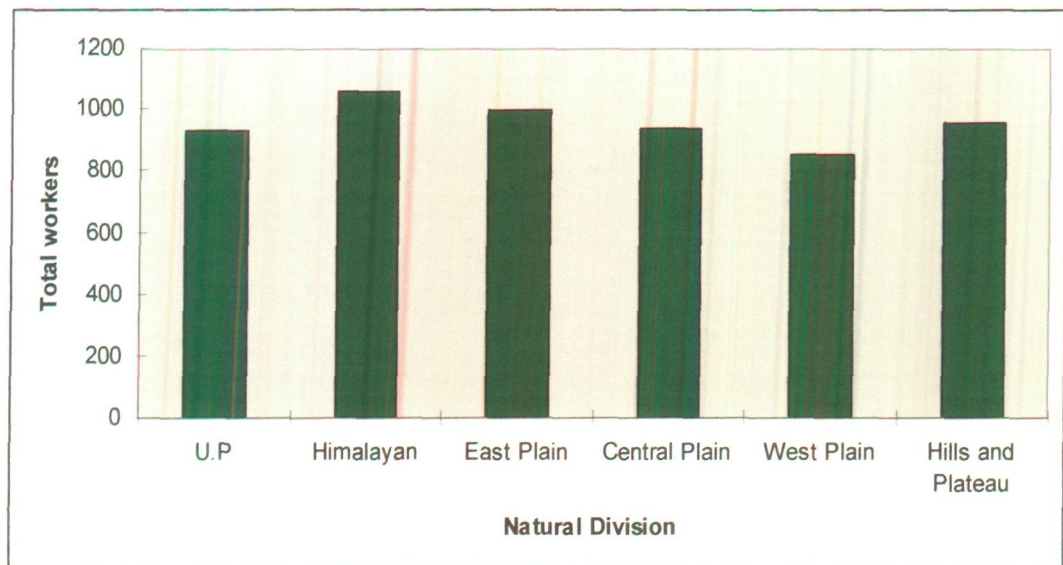
Among various regions of Uttar Pradesh the participation of female workers in agriculture sector was higher in the Himalayan region than the western plains. The important factors affecting this distribution were the sex-ratio, the very active participation of women in the agricultural occupations and emigration of males of working ages. The ratio of female among the working agricultural classes of the Himalayan division was highest in the state, being 1,057 against the State average of 930 for all

agricultural classes (fig. 5). Women in this region took an active part in agriculture which was the main occupation of the majority of the population. People also owned small holdings and they worked their land themselves and rarely employed labour. In the rural areas women usually participated in the family cultivation. Since *purdah* was not prevailing in hill regions therefore there was no attempt to conceal the fact that women worked on agricultural land.

However the Western Plains had the lowest proportion of females in agriculture among all regions of U.P. (Fig 5). The agricultural classes of this division were the most prosperous in the State and had a high proportion of high castes and higher branches of other castes. They did not permit their women to work in the fields, or, even if they did, the fact was concealed from the census enumerators.

The Hills and Plateau had the second highest proportion of workers. It was the second highest in the State after Eastern Plains, which was only slightly higher. Women in this division worked freely in the fields and there was no attempt at concealing this fact.

**Figure 5. Female Workers per thousand Male Workers in all Agricultural Classes and Sub Classes by Natural Division in U.P., 1951**



Source: Census of India 1951, volume II, Uttar Pradesh, Part I-A Report, table 178, p. 211.

## 2.7 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to reconstruct the situation of women field labour in Uttar Pradesh from government reports of pre-independence period and gazetteers. It was found that various castes and communities constrained women from working outside the house. The evaluation of the British reports and various census reports helped showing that women of rich cultivators were restricted from working on fields. But women belonging to poor peasant households were found assisting their men in the field without any restrictions. Women of the lower castes like *Kachchi*, *Koris*, *Kurmis*, *hamar*, *Passi* and *Dhobi* worked as agricultural labourers along with their husbands. Although

these women actively participated in agriculture the work they did was considered inferior.

Also the tools and implements that were used for farming were very minor. It was found that where the tasks were more mechanized women were not employed. For instance in irrigation, women were only employed where there was a need to empty the bucket on the well head. The use of Persian wheel and animal power in irrigation again did not require female labourers. The use of plough was also highly restricted to women. There were social obligations that forbid women to use the plough on fields.

Across different regions, more women were found to be engaged as labourers in agriculture in the Western Himalayan region and the Central and Eastern plains. Moreover migration was also another factor which lead to the increase in participation of women agricultural workers in these regions. The Western plains witnessed the lowest participation of women in the agriculture sector. The lower level of female participation in this region was due to the prevalence of *purdah* system. Women were also badly affected by the unequal distribution of wages between men and women for the same nature of agricultural work. The wages for agricultural labour were made in kind and cash and women were always paid less then the amount received by men.

It can be concluded that in all the agricultural operations i.e, sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, and reaping etc., women were always paid less than men. Therefore wage differentiation persisted in United Provinces. Unfortunately even today despite increase in wages the unequal distribution of wages for women still continues. Also the active participation of lower caste women in agricultural work force depended on the economic status of their families. In adverse conditions women had to work on agricultural fields as wage workers.

## Chapter III

# *Women's Role in Agriculture since 1951*

## **WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE SINCE 1951**

Although women have been performing an important role in the agricultural sector but they have always remained invisible due to traditional values, gender bias, illiteracy, superstition, dominant role of males in decision making etc (Giriaapa, 1988). As a consequence the crucial role played by women in farming has not been recognized.

They have been rarely identified as farmers or owners of agricultural holdings. Women still use minor tools and implements and are economically backward. Even though they were the first originators of the art of cultivation and many other related civilizations but, they are always considered as the weaker sex and inferior to their male counterparts (Tyagi, 1994). Female agricultural workers are responsible for the most back-breaking jobs like transplanting, weeding, sowing, etc., but their work has always remained unnoticed. They were mostly seen helping and assisting the male members on agricultural fields. For instance, if a woman was spotted collecting the stubbles of the previous crops and applying manure along with her male counterpart then she was never called a farmer but was always seen as a helper to the male farmer. Various studies have shown that women were often found assisting their men in sowing the fields behind a plough (Madalia, 1985; Kansara,

1995). According to the National Commission Report (1988) also known as Shramshakti Report, women's contribution in agriculture was always considered as 'secondary', 'marginal' and 'supplementary'. In agriculture they were best known as 'helpers'.

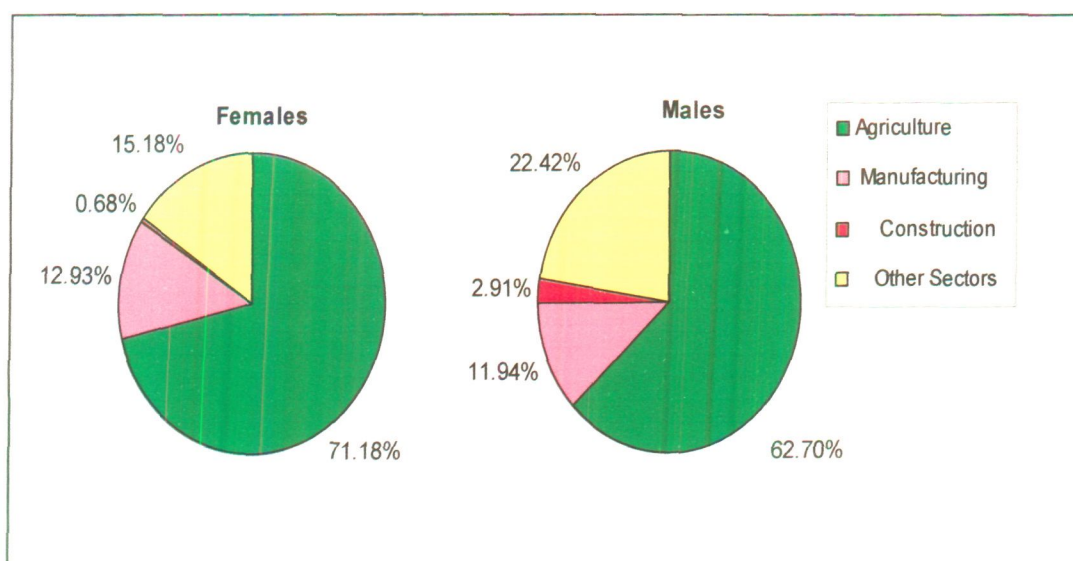
Therefore women have always been considered a weaker sex and it was because of this that they were not regarded as the main producers in the agricultural sector. In the male-headed household it was impossible for a woman to take decisions regarding the production of agricultural crops. Giriappa (1998) found that among all the agricultural workers, women were relatively poorer, undernourished, weak decision makers and economically less organized. Various studies have highlighted that there were certain socio-economic factors that affected the participation of women in agriculture (Singh & Singh, 1993; Nayyar, 1987; Row, 1985; Bagchi, 1981).

Men and women have been performing different roles in the society, but aspects such as cultural expression, work and mobility, education, health and social awareness have changed the role of women over the years. It was because of all these factors that overall participation of women in the work force was very low. According to Census 2001, female population of U.P. only 6.35 per cent females out of 47.31 per cent were actively involved in the work force. Among the working



females 71.18 per cent were primarily involved in the agricultural sector as compared with 62.70 per cent males (Fig 6).

**Figure 6. Distribution of Workers in Different Sectors in Uttar Pradesh 2001**



Source: Census 2001, Uttar Pradesh

Note: Percentage was calculated for each category,

Since agricultural work is scattered and disperse in nature therefore, the work-force is characterized by scattered and fragmented area of employment, seasonality of employment, lack of security and low legislative protection to the workers (GOI, 2001 a). Since agricultural work is highly gendered therefore it became even more difficult for women agricultural workers to survive. They also suffer with lack of mobility and inequality. Majority of them work as agricultural labour or as unpaid workers on family-owned land. There is wide disparity between men's wages and women's wages, with women being paid far less than men. The technological changes in the agriculture sector also eliminated

many jobs traditionally performed by women and the migration of men from villages has also imposed further burdens on them (Labour Commission, 2002).

Women's lives in villages are very hard; they wake up at 3 a. m. and attended all the household chores, collect water and also work for eight hours a day in agriculture (GOI, 2007 a). While women carry the prime responsibility of taking care of the household and helping their men on fields, these responsibilities were considered secondary to the role of male bread winners. Her personal contribution got merged with the family and became invisible. They were best seen as providing supplementary income to the family (Shramshakti, 1988). Discrimination in every sphere, whether it is work, wages or share in agricultural land, has adversely affected the position of women.

### **3.1 Gender Division of Work in Agriculture**

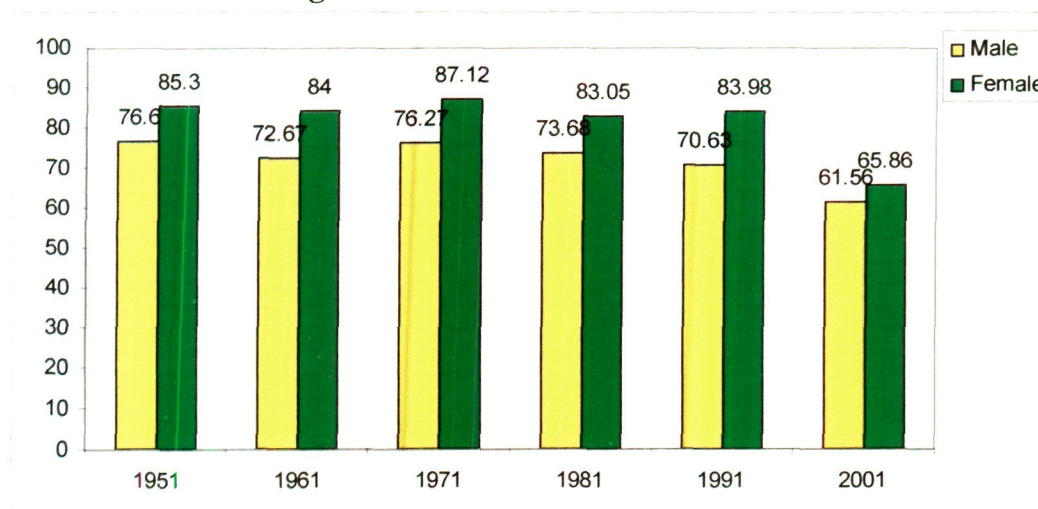
A very strict division of labour on the basis of gender characterises agricultural activities (Labour Commission, 2002; Singh and Meenakshi, 2004). There are certain tasks assigned to men only and certain for women. Women almost never perform ploughing operations, while transplanting is more or less exclusively the domain of women. According to Boserup (1970), the division of labour in terms of sex was a natural result of physiological and psychological differences between

men and women. But apart from child bearing there were not many examples of sex division of labour which were truly reasonable. To be an independent farmer was a male dominated task in India.

The Census data from 1951 to 2001 showed that in U.P. more females than males were employed in agriculture sector (Fig. 7). But due to the male-centered society women in general could not independently perform all the farm operations on their own.

For example ploughing is a male dominated activity in farming, and therefore it was never assigned to female agricultural labourers. Since ancient times plough has been used for tilling the land and was held in high esteem and also regarded as an auspicious article, as a result women were restricted from using it (Kansara, 1995).

**Figure 7. Percentage of Male and Female Agricultural Workers in U.P. during 1951 to 2001**



Source: Census of India, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 & 2001.

Women did not work in land preparation because of male dominance and the strict restrictions on the use of plough. It was also believed that men were stronger and could handle the plough better than women and therefore it uprooted women from the leading role in rural life (Tyagi, 1994; Kaur & Sharma, 1992). Therefore, the sex-typing of tasks in the production process led to increased separation of women from their active roles. Since there were taboos associated with women operating the plough therefore, women were forced to depend on men to begin the process of cultivation (Jain, 1984). Although, Prakash (2003) stated that, where both men and women had equal access to modern methods and inputs there was no evidence that either sex was more efficient than the other.

The tasks that were assigned to females were more repetitive in nature, less paid and unskilled. While the work that men did was more mechanical, highly paid and skilled. It was because of this that the employment of casual women agricultural labourers was heavily concentrated in harvesting, weeding and transplanting activities (Chattopadhyay, 1982).

All the tasks that were primarily carried out by women were considered lighter form of work. While the work specifically performed by men was considered heavy and arduous (Sen, 1999). There existed a

common pattern of work performed by men and women. For instance, the heavy physical work of land preparation was performed by men only. While the women were assigned only those tasks which were repetitive and time-consuming. Weeding was exclusively women's work, while harvesting involved both men and women (Srinivas, 1977). The traditional manual transplanting of rice in the paddy fields was performed by women only (Bagchi, 1981).

Other tasks that were primarily performed by women included, clod breaking, seed selection, sowing, transplanting, weeding, watching the crops, spreading of manure, threshing, winnowing and cleaning the farm produce. (Chun, 1957; Randhawa, 1980; Madalia, 1985; Shramshakti, 1988; Sakesena, 2004). Of all the agricultural operations women were stereotyped in three most common agricultural operations viz, weeding, transplanting and harvesting.

### **3.2 Regional Variations in Women's Work**

There were regional variations in the participation of women workers in agriculture. According to the General Report of the Census (1961) the participation of females was higher in the hilly regions, namely Tehri Garhwal (677), Uttar Kashi (664), Chamoli (662), Almora (620), Garhwal (618) and Pithoragarh (615). Table 1 showed the districts of Uttar Pradesh, where participation of women in agriculture was higher

than their male counterparts as well as those districts where their participation was less than 20 per thousand female workers.

It was remarkable that in the hills districts of Tehri Garwal, Uttarakashi, Chamoli, Almora, Garhwal, and Pithoragarh, there were relatively more workers among females than males. It was noticed that, in the hills crop production was done on slopes and terraced fields. Mechanization was virtually impossible therefore all the work was done manually. Women in these areas actively participated in farm production. They took decisions regarding the choice of crops, storage, livestock, credit and farm inputs (Bhati and Singh, 1987).

While in the plains only one-sixth of females were in the working force; districts like Bijnor, Moradabad, Budaun, Rampur, Bareilly, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Aligarh, Agra, Etah, Mainpuri, Farrukhabad and Etahwah formed a solid block, where less than 20 per thousand females worked in agriculture. A study conducted by Singh and Sharma (1992) in Uttar Pradesh also revealed that farm women's contribution in various agricultural activities was greater in the hills regions as compared to western plains of Uttar Pradesh. Women particularly in the western region had a lower participation in agriculture sector. One reason behind this was because of the development of the secondary and tertiary sectors in the economy in U.P as a whole.

**Table 1. Male and Female Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers per Thousand Workers in U. P. (1961)**

S.NO	Districts	Cultivators & Agricultural labourers	
		Male	Female
1.	Uttar Kashi	548	664
2.	Chamoli	493	662
3.	Pithoragarh	435	615
4.	Tehri-Garhwal	508	677
5.	Garhwal	380	618
6.	Almora	442	620
7.	Bijnor	322	15
8.	Moradabad	408	17
9.	Budaun	522	13
10.	Rampur	449	14
11.	Bareilly	411	10
12.	Pilibhit	450	10
13.	Shahjahanpur	499	14
14.	Saharanpur	274	6
15.	Muzzafarnagar	328	14
16.	Aligarh	338	11
17.	Agra	271	10
18.	Etah	450	14
19.	Mainpuri	442	16
20.	Farrukhabad	460	14
21.	Etawah	450	19

Source: Census of India, 1961, Uttar Pradesh, Volume XV, Part I-A (ii). General Report of the Census, Table 10.5, p.161



The western region was more industrialized as more than one-fourth of the total workforce was involved in industries, trade and commerce, and services (Subas, 1984). Secondly, in the plains the social tradition did not favor women's movement outside the boundaries of their homes. While women in hill regions did not observe *purdah*, this was quite common in other parts of India (Bhati and Singh, 1987). According to Boserup (1970) seclusion of females was related to the economy and its demand for female labour; *purdah* was prevalent in those areas and farming systems where female field labour was not required.

### 3.3 Social Constraints

In Uttar Pradesh there were social customs which also restricted women to work on others' fields. And because of this women's participation in the work-force was below the all India average. Gopalan (1995) also examined that it was strongly the cultural factor which excluded women from working on others' fields. The primary reasons behind the low participation rate of female work-force were social stigma and taboos that restricted their movement outside the boundaries of their homes. "The women of the higher orders i.e., *Brahmana*, *Ksatriya* were not generally concerned with any type of economic activities" (Tyagi, 1994).



“Farm women in higher socio-economic status did not enjoy as much involvement in decision making process regarding farm operations, as those of middle or low socio-economic status families” (Varma, 1992). In Uttar Pradesh the high caste males never allowed their females to work on the agricultural fields. This was seen for both Hindu and Muslim communities.

“A *Brahman* or a *Thakur* lady would never go out of the harem to assist her husband or son in the field, nor will do any work outside the four walls of her *zanana* which would help the male members in smoothing his path for earning bread. Similarly a Muhammadan lady, who has an old tradition about the former greatness of her family, will not get out for work, and the only work she would do is spinning thread inside her house” (Duffrein, 1890). It was observed that, in the patriarchal society those women who worked outside on fields and survived on wage employment were kept under the lower hierarchy. Because a woman’s physical presence in the public sphere was not accepted by the society (Bennett, 1992).

*Purdah* is the most common form of female seclusion in the world. It revolves around the physical segregation of females through the use of boundary makers such as curtains, veils, and walls. It is closely associated with Muslim religious tradition in India, but the Hindus of North India

also practiced a form of *purdah* (Miller, 1982). In Uttar Pradesh both Hindus and Muslims practiced *purdah* (*ibid*). Here the rigid caste taboos coupled with sexual isolation or *purdah* was responsible for restricting women's activities to the home environment (Bagchi, 1981). Therefore the upper caste females who observed '*purdah*' did not work outside on agricultural land.

However, females belonging to the lower social hierarchy were always engaged in productive activities in order to supplement their family's income. These women mostly worked in pastures and fields and therefore worked independently for their family needs (Jafri, 1985; Tyagi, 1994). The backward class women formed a large section of wage agricultural labourers. The lower class women have more mobility and freedom than women belonging to the upper castes.

Among schedule castes women were more actively involved in the labour force because of two factors. Firstly, they were economically backward and secondly because there was no social stigma attached to women in these communities. In western Uttar Pradesh, there were districts where the upper caste *Thakurs* never allowed their women to take part in farm operations (Lerche, 1998). Although landless women working as agricultural wage labourers were less bound to traditions that

restricted women of higher classes, still they faced considerable hardships in carrying out agricultural activities.

### **3.4 Technological Constraint**

The decreasing demand for labour, changes in cropping patterns and increased mechanization also eliminated many employment options for women agricultural labourers. Agriculture totally changed from a female occupation to male occupation with the use of plough. Since ploughing was predominantly done by the male agricultural labourers therefore female agricultural labourers were assigned non-mechanical tasks. Women were considered unskilled and were never allowed to plough the agricultural fields.

The invention of various kinds of technologies for instance, pump sets for irrigation, wheat threshers, tractors and wheat reapers displaced women from the those tasks that were traditionally performed by them (Kaur, 1988). Men and women were equally involved in the traditional use, preparation and application of manure but after the introduction of chemical fertilizers men performed the task rather than women (Punia, 1992). The use of herbicide based weed management adversely affected women's employment in agriculture. Women were the principal labour force for weeding operation and they suffered most from the introduction of herbicides (*ibid*).

The new agricultural technology has largely adversely affected women's participation in farm activities. According to Tripathy (1996) The Committee on status of women in India (1975) has reported that, "another problem that affects women's participation in agriculture is the introduction of modern methods of cultivation, which is resulting in a gradual displacement of women and shrinking of their activities". Therefore women especially from the poor socio-economic background have become victims of new technology.

Technology referred as, "the knowledge applied by man to improve production or marketing process. It is seen in hybrid seeds, improved crop varieties, pesticides, machinery and fertilizers" (Reddy *et. al.*, 2006). The objective of technology in agriculture was to provide more output from a given bundle of production inputs. The use of advanced technology in agriculture was first adopted in the post Green Revolution period. The term 'Green Revolution' was perceived as a period of productivity break through that emerged from the high-yielding variety of seeds. The second phase of the green revolution was a phase in which the technology was internalized during the decade 1970 (Basu, 2007).

The rapid modernization and the introduction of new technologies such as those that characterized the green revolution had a differential impact on rural population by both class and gender. As far as women

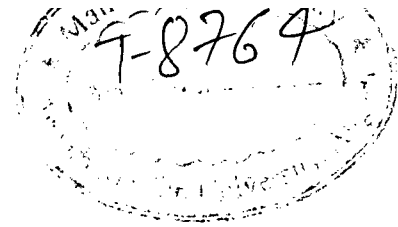
were concerned, their level of participation, knowledge and inputs were marginalized, and their role shifted from being “primary producers to subsidiary workers. The improved agricultural technology also heightened the productivity gap between men and women. In mechanized farming, men monopolized the use of new technology even though it required less muscle power (Ram, 2004).

The modernization process in agriculture sector which included the introduction of high yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and modern implements, displaced women from traditional activities and pushed them to less skilled jobs and as support agents rather than major handlers of equipment (Verma *et al.*, 2006). The Green Revolution, which focused on increasing yields of rice and wheat, entailed a shift in inputs from human to technical. According to Varma (1992) the participation of women agricultural labourers in land preparation and weeding operation reduced as a result of technological advancement. Threshing and winnowing was handled by men because of the use of mechanical equipment. This indicated a rapid loss of women’s control over means of production and their inadequate recruitment in the active labour force in India (Kaur, 1988).

Agriculture, is however, modernized due to technological advancement. But as soon as the agricultural operations were

mechanized, that work was taken up by men and women labourers were thrown out of work (Varma, 1992; Kak, 1994). Increased use of mechanized farming relegates the role of women to simple manual operations. An immediate consequence of technological modernization is the straight displacement of women's labour through the elimination of various traditional activities. Under these circumstances, men cultivated cash crops through the use of new technology while women were left with the cultivation of subsistence food crops with the help of traditional cultivation methods. An obvious consequence of this was that the labour productivity of men increased manifold while that of women remained stable or declined. This loss of women's labour productivity further contributed towards a decline in their position (Ram, 2004).

The technological changes have exerted multiple and complex effects on women, some of which created a negative impact on their labour participation and productivity. For instance, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, arrival of machines like combine harvester took away jobs from women. This in turn reduced the number of working days for women during the harvesting season. As a result women received inadequate wages (Gupta and Maiti, 2008).



### 3.5 Problems Faced by Women

**Health Hazards:** Women in the agricultural sector were burdened with tedious operations like sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting. These activities had poor bearing on their health. Weeding was done in a squatting posture or at times in bending posture with the help of short handle tools such as *Khurpi*, *Khunti*, hand hoe, spade, etc. Therefore the posture adopted while performing this activity was strenuous and resulted in body discomfort, leading to serious health problems (Gandotra and Patel, 2009).

Women had to bend continuously while carrying out transplanting operations. Apart from backaches, they got sore, infected feet with fungal growth (Shramshakti, 1988). Labourers also got snake bites while working in water filled rice fields and sometimes agricultural equipments caused them few minor or medium grade injuries (Joshi, 1999 and Hasalkar, 2006). Both men as well as women had serious health problems while working in agricultural fields. Blair and Zahm (1995) pointed out that there were not only biological differences but also physiological differences between the sexes. Women were likely to be affected more than men due to biological factors such as their menstrual cycle, reproductive function and menopause (Mediratta, 2009).

Generally women received no medical help since they were the only unorganized labourers where the government did not provide any medical attention. It is also surprising that, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 was not applicable to women agricultural labourers. This Act was only applicable for workers employed in factories, mines and plantations. Mediratta (2009) also highlighted the shortcoming of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 in not providing maternity protection for women employees in the informal sectors.

**Table 2. Occupational Health Hazards in Agriculture**

Occupation	Health problems
Agricultural Workers	<b>General</b> Generalised body ache; aches in calves, hips, back, legs and shoulders; nasal catarrh irritating coughs, irritation of the respiratory system; respiratory allergies; respiratory tract infection; tightness of chest; chest capacities; pneumoconiosis; cutaneous allergies; skin irritation; rashes and pruritus; mycosis; eye irritation; paddy keratitis; helminthiasis —schistosomiasis, ankylostomiasis; paronocia; fungal infection in feet; eczema; osteomyelitis of fingers.
	<b>Injuries</b> High rate of thresher accidents, especially while churning sugarcane and ginning cotton; also serious physical injuries occur from cutting edges of implements such as sickles and machetes; for lack of first aid facilities, small injuries become serious and often lead to tetanus.
	<b>Toxicities</b> Pesticide poisoning; intestinal respiratory and neurological disorders; nausea; vomiting; abdominal cramps; diarrhoea, cough; headaches; vertigo; blurred vision; muscular twitching; convulsions; loss of reflexes; loss of sphincter control; disturbance of equilibrium; jaundice; coma and ultimately death may result by respiratory arrest.
	<b>Gynaecological</b> Abortions; premature deaths and still births; high rate of neo-natal, infant and maternal mortality.

Source: Shramshakti Report, 1988, p.142, 143.



For women workers the heavy work such as cultivation and harvesting have high rates of still and premature births and female and infant mortality. There were a series of health issues related to women workers in agriculture (Table 2). According to Fulekar (2000), women's exposure to a variety of pesticides was associated with spontaneous abortion, premature births, low birth weights, and birth defects. There is still ignorance about the proper use of pesticides among women. No government records of women's health in the unorganized sector were maintained.

**Seasonal Migration:** Agricultural operations were seasonal in nature and resulted in periodic unemployment. Therefore Indian agricultural workers remained idle during a large part of the year and there were evidences that such rural underemployment has increased (Sharma and Singh, 1993; Chun, 1957). Although both male and female employment exhibited seasonality, its effect was far greater for women than men. Men were engaged in farm activities throughout the crop season but that was not the case for women (Saikia, 2004). But in situations when there were minimum opportunities for men's work, there was more possibilities of males to migration.

Another factor that led to male migration was the mechanization in agriculture and better employment opportunities in neighboring cities and

states. According to Shramshakti Report (1988) the polarization between rural and urban areas with considerable concentration of wealth and social services in the urban economies led to migration of male workers in large number. In Uttar Pradesh, the seasonal migration frequently occurred in the eastern districts, Garhwal regions and western districts as well, where men migrated to neighboring states of West Bengal and Delhi (Sen, 1999; Chopra and Ghosh, 2001, Paris *et al.*, 2005).

Migration was classified into short term and long term on the basis of duration of absence from the village. In short term migration or seasonal migration, male family members left the villages after land preparation or planting seasonal crops and came back during harvesting due to increased demand for daily labour. In the long term migration, migrants remained away from families for more than six months or more than a year. Since women were geographically less mobile than men therefore, they faced various hardships (Acharya and Mathrani, 1993). Migration of men, especially under distress situation implied more work burden for women.

There was an increase in the number of wage-paid days of employment for female workers between 1987-88 and 1993-94 compared to male workers in U.P. This increase was attributed to the migration of male workers in adverse conditions as well as for further enhancement of

their economic earnings (Krishnaraj and Shah, 2004). In the absence of male members, women bore the main brunt of poverty. As a result, they were compelled to take up the responsibility of various farming operations and the household work (Prakash, 2011). Since all the decisions were made by the male family members therefore in their absence women's work became more complex.

It was perceived that women worked independently in the absence of male members of the family and had a better status in the family (Griappa, 1988). However, Jetley (1987) revealed that there was little change in the authoritative structure of the family, and the major decisions regarding purchase of cattle, inputs or land were postponed till the migrant males visited. Women only took decisions on problems regarding the daily subsistence of the family. Since women had limited access to the economic resources they were forced to depend on their male family members.

Women cultivators faced difficulties in the absence of males. Since land is an important economic resource in agriculture and women hardly had independent land holdings, therefore limited access to land rights restricted women in taking loans for the use of better farm technology and seeds. Thus women only acted as mere caretakers of the agricultural land.

**Unequal Land Rights:** Generally women farmers did not hold agricultural land and were completely dependent on the male members of their families. In the absence of the male members it was difficult for them to get loans from banks for buying seeds, manure and advance technology for cultivation (GOI, 1974). Land rights served multiple functions in the lives of rural women, which were not easy to replicate through other means, apart from the direct benefits in terms of growing crops, trees, fodder, fuel, and vegetable garden, or keeping livestock, practicing sericulture, and so on. Indirect advantages in terms of collateral for credit or an asset, which could be sold or mortgaged when needed. Title to land also enhanced the probability of finding supplementary wage employment and served as an asset base for rural non-farm enterprises (Sridhar *et al.*, 2009).

As the Land laws provided by the government were so rigid, there was no scope for women to become the individual owners of agricultural land. In U.P., agricultural land is distributed according to the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Land Reform Act, 1950. This Act only provided land to widows, and unmarried daughters but that too in the absence of male sons. There was no place given to unmarried daughters. For women farmers to use land more efficiently and for contributing to food security, they needed land.

**Inadequate Wages:** Another form of discrimination faced by women in agriculture was the inadequate wages. The wage differentials between female and male agricultural workers were based on a pre-assumed gender character. Employers and contractors offered lower wages to women, regardless of their performance in work. Discrimination to farm women was practiced in two ways, one by paying them lesser than men for the same type of work and the other was by restricting them to low paid unskilled jobs and denying them access to better paid work (Punia, 1992; Joshi, 1999). In such a situation of social and economic neglect, women had no better options.

Uttar Pradesh incidentally had relatively lower female agricultural workers' wages and higher male-female wage differentials compared to other states. Not only in U.P. but also in rest of the India the estimated all-India agricultural average daily real wage rates for males and females showed that female workers' wage continued to be lower than that of male workers (Singh, 1996). Another problem that women faced was that majority of women in agriculture comprised of unpaid family labour. Those women who worked on their family farms were often classified as unpaid family workers in the Census (National Commission, 1988). Therefore the work of women in a family was not recognized and never counted in the economy. Unpaid work and inadequate wages forced

women to depend on their husbands and male members in the family for financial support. There existed a myth that since females were inefficient therefore the wage rate paid to females was lower than that of their male counterparts even for doing the same work in same time (Suman, 2008).

**Long Working Hours:** Female agricultural workers had to work for long hours. There are number of studies which showed that women worked longer hours and contributed more than men. According to Chopra and Ghosh (2001), women on an average worked for 11.75 a day and minimum 8.5 hours per day. Women in developing countries generally worked longer hours than men and shouldered a disproportionate share of responsibilities and time for household maintenance and care activities (FAO, 2005; FAO, 2011 a). Women farmers faced greater time constraints than men because they spent more time than men on domestic work. They shared the responsibility of the family both within as well as outside their homes (FAO, 2011 b).

## Chapter IV

# *Changes in Land Legislation and Women's Position in Agriculture*

## **CHANGES IN LAND LEGISLATION AND WOMEN'S POSITION IN AGRICULTURE**

Land is a significant form of property, which is a critical determinant of economic well being, social status and political power. In India, agricultural land is the most important form of asset which not only provided sufficient means of subsistence to the farmers but also employment opportunities to the agricultural labouring classes. In the patriarchal (male dominated) society, land is owned and controlled by men and the women were deprived of land rights (National Commission, 1988). Although, a large number of women worked on agricultural land but their land ownership was not more than 2 per cent in the country (Velayudhan, 2009).

It was revealed by the World development Report 1996 that, female agricultural labourers had fewer opportunities to secure livelihood because of the constraints to ownership and lack of access to credit (Labour Commission, 2002). A farmer who ploughed the land is always considered as a male and therefore was the beneficiary of land and this bias still persisted in farming. The National Sample Survey of India Survey of Farmers (2003) defined a farmer more precisely as “a person who possessed some land and was engaged in agricultural activities on any part of that land during the last 365 days” (GOI, 2008).



In Uttar Pradesh, the factual situation at the grass root level showed that the percentage of women involved in agricultural activities were larger than men and hence their contribution to agriculture was more than their male counterparts. Despite the significant role that women played in agriculture, they were never viewed as farmers. This was mainly due to their lack of control over agricultural land. According to the Annual Report of the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (2006-07) the distribution of land rights to women in U.P. showed a very gloomy picture as only 6 per cent of women legally owned land while the joint ownership over land was only 3 per cent. Therefore lack of access to security of tenure and ownership of land was a serious limitation for women farmers. The risk of poverty and the physical well-being of a woman were significantly dependent on her direct access to income and productive assets such as land.

Historical records showed that land was not formally owned in the subsistence production system, but the use rights were vested in men and women who produced food for the kin (Smith and Trujillo, 1999; Guerny and Topouzis, 1996). During the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Awadh, women of both Hindu and Muslim communities were found inheriting, selling and otherwise disposing of their *Zamindari* or *Milkiyat* rights (Habib, 1999). According to Jassal (2001), women of the Mughal period held land

collectively, and became shareholders under the *Farman-e-Musammati* tenure. Females also obtained their shares in *Zamindari* in the form of *mihr* or dowry claims upon their husbands.

During the reign of Akbar, the grants were provided to women and this continued in the later period as well. Although the *madad-e-maash* grants of the Mughal state gave rights to a limited group of women over land to use it as a productive resource. However these women belonged to the ruling class and could theoretically enjoy full proprietary rights over land but only under certain specific conditions (*ibid*). These women did not actively participate in the agricultural activities. Therefore the land rights were not beneficial for them. Women of high class families were secluded and restricted from cultivating the agricultural land along with their men (Jafri, 1985).

Although women of the wealthy households in some regions sometimes possessed and transacted in landed property, but the degree of control over it typically remained limited. In case of Muslim women most of the times, the agricultural holdings were given in the form of *mihr* (dowry claims). According to Habib (1999) there were numerous cases in the Allahabad region during the 17<sup>th</sup> century where Muslim women often obtained their share in *Zamindari* in satisfaction of their dowry claims upon their husbands. Although women received some share in

agricultural land, it was their husbands and the other male family members who were selling and using the *Zamindari* land. There were substantial evidences that the economic resources were in the hands of male members of the household which often did not benefit the female members in equal degree. Habib (1999), further illustrated that, in the original documents of Oudh, a number of Muslim *Shaikhs* and Hindu carpenters sold the *Zamindari* rights of their women, they declared, “they acted for themselves and on behalf of their mother and sisters”.

Thus it was established that women did not practice full control over land but had rights only for namesake. This showed that, although during Mughal period women had the right to lease out, mortgage, bequeath or sell the *zaminadari* land, but this remained merely on paper. Further, their heritable capacity was made subject to certain conditions such as chastity, not getting married again, etc. Also, their rights were not absolute in the inherited property. Women could neither spend the share as their own nor had power over it as regards gifts, mortgage or sale (Devi, 2006).

Therefore, there was a difference between the legal ownership and effective control over land. Rights in any form of property were defined as claims that were legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimized authority, be it a village level institution or some

higher level bodies of the State (Agarwal, 1994). Rights in agricultural land should always associate with the right to use the land by the person who is the rightful owner. A woman's legal right to own agricultural land should be recognized as socially legitimate and should also be enforced by the law. But women have always been marginalized and denied land rights, not only by their family and society, but by the policy makers as well.

Agricultural land was largely owned by the males and was unevenly distributed. The land legislations did not provide equal rights to women in agricultural land. The traditional usufruct rights that women held to community land were lost after the land reforms (Masika, 2002). Land tenure referred to the institutional arrangements governing the ownership and utilization of agricultural land. As such, it is an extremely complex system, reflecting the multiplicity of relationships between men and women (Tai, 1974).

The policies on land reforms suffered from patriarchal ideology as the distribution of land and house sites were usually given to the male head of the household. Although the objective of land reforms was to confer ownership of land rights to the landless, and give security of landholdings to marginal and small farmers but it did not provide full fledged rights to women farmers. It was also observed that, women of the

peasant class primarily involved in agriculture as agricultural labourers and small cultivators did not get any land from the state. There were no privileges under the State law that granted full control over land to such women.

Mishra (2006) highlighted that, in spite of women's significant participation in peasant movements, they were not given rights to claim agricultural land independently. Women working as agricultural labourers and as small or poor peasants never viewed agricultural land as property. For them, it was the source of livelihood. Their life was also completely embedded in agriculture, while for the upper classes land was held and controlled as a means of private property. Effective access to land was perhaps the single most significant determinant of economic and social status and power in rural India. And women's unequal access to agricultural land was one of the most important forms of persistent gender inequalities.

#### **4.1 Tenancy Acts and Implications for Women**

Men predominantly controlled the pattern of land allocation and this formal ownership of land was passed from father to son. Such pattern of land ownership still prevails and is followed by the policy makers in the formulation of land reforms. We can see the glimpse of this pattern of land ownership in almost all the Tenancy Acts.

When the Agra Tenancy Act 1901 was passed, the devolution of tenancies and the division of rent was given to males. In the order of succession, male lineal descendants in the male line were the Class I heir, under section 24 of the Agra Tenancy Act, 1901. The land rights of women were completely dependent on their marital status. Only widow of the deceased tenant holder had the right to transfer the land in her name and came under Class II heir (Government Gazette, 1925).

As far as daughters' rights in the agricultural land were concerned, the Agra Tenancy Act of 1901 gave no privileges to unmarried or married daughters of the deceased. If there was no male heir of a female tenant holder then the interest in the holding after her death devolved on her daughter's son, provided that he was dependent upon the deceased tenant at the time of her death under sub-section 2 (Section 25). Further it was found that, if widow who inherited an interest in a holding under section 24, died (or remarries) or surrendered or abandoned such interest, then the holding will not go to her heir but to the heirs of the last male landowner (under section 25). Hence, even for widows there was no certainty of land rights, as the land went back to the original source which was dominated by men.

The question of remarriage was also a matter of concern as it directly terminated the tenancy rights of a widowed woman and deprived

her from using the agricultural land. It was perceived that after remarriage, the female would at once become dependent on her new husband for her livelihood and should therefore be considered to have had no interest in the inherited tenancy (Government Gazette, 1926). This showed that in the male dominated society the women were subordinate to their husbands and depended upon them for their survival.

In the Agra Tenancy Act 1926, it was again found that the inherited interest of a widow lasted till her death or remarriage and on the occurrence of any of these circumstances, her interest passed on her husband's reversionary heirs (Bilgrami, 1940). In Gazette 1926, an order no. 3671C/1A-487/1908 was passed by the Revenue Department of United Provinces, under which the word "or re-marries" was struck out. It was considered that re-marriage ought not to entail forfeiture of a widow's interest. On her death, the heirs of the first husband, not her second husband, succeeded to the land.

Later the United Provinces Tenancy Act, 1939 also omitted the word 'remarriage' but there was no change made in the enforcement of the law in this regard. The question of inherited tenancy of a female tenant was dealt within Section 36 of this act, which stated that, "when a female tenant inherited an interest in a holding as a widow or as a daughter, 'marries' then such holding or such part of such holding shall

pass to the heir of the last male tenant holder”. Hence it was noticed that, the word ‘remarriage’ was replaced with ‘marriage’ as it applied to both widows and unmarried daughters. The reason behind this was the introduction of a new class of heirs in the order of succession that comprised of unmarried daughters.

Before the United Provinces Tenancy Act of 1939, daughters had no share in the agricultural land. According to Section 35, when the occupancy tenant holder died then his holding devolved in accordance with the order of succession and the unmarried daughters were held very low in the following order,

- “a) Male lineal descendants in the male line of descends:  
Provided that no member of this class shall inherit if any male descendant between him and the deceased is alive;*
- b) Widow;*
  - c) Father;*
  - d) Mother, being a widow;*
  - e) Step mother, being a widow;*
  - f) Father’s father;*
  - g) Father’s mother, being a widow;*
  - h) Widow of a male lineal descendant in the male line of descent;*
  - i) Unmarried daughters”*

Therefore only unmarried daughters could become the tenant holder but their position was very low and they could only inherit the tenancy rights in the absence of the male heirs and that too after seven



lines of descendants. The rights of step-mother, father's mother, widow of a male lineal descendant in the male line of descent were also included from the United Provinces Tenancy Act, 1939.

Thus, in all the tenancy Laws women's right to own agricultural land were constrained by their marital status. Even if the laws were not discriminatory, they failed to protect women's interests. Since the land was owned by men in the patriarchal system, credit was denied to women.

#### **4.2 Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Act, 1950**

After Independence, the Zaminadri System was abolished in almost all the states of India. In Uttar Pradesh, the first Congress Government under the leadership of the first Chief Minister, late Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant, took up the task of agrarian reconstruction by enacting Zamindari Abolition Land Reform Act, 1950 (Mishra, 1996). Masika (2002), Chaturvedi (2002) and Sharma (2006) stated that traditionally women had rights to use community land. But when changes were brought in the tenurial system right after Independence no place was however given to women. After the introduction of land reforms, land titles were given to men, denying women's access to land.

All the revenue and land reforms acts were highly discriminatory. This was clear from the fact that Section 10 (2) of the Uttar Pradesh

Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950 (UPZALR) did not consider women as a tenant holder. This section stated that, nothing shall apply to a tenant if his land holder is, a woman, a minor, a lunatic, an idiot, a person incapable of cultivating by reason of blindness or physical infirmity (GOI, 1953). Hence women were placed under the disabled category. Under this act, the devolution rules favored the male lineal descendants, which were applicable to three main classes of tenant holders i.e. *bhumidhar*, *sirdar* and *asami* (Section 129). Among these three classes of land holders the heritable and transferable rights were not granted to *sirdar* or *asami* (Section 153).

Therefore, Uttar Pradesh was one of the states where a *sirdar* did not have a right to bequeath his rights by will (Sharma, 1984). A *bhumidhar* could not ordinarily give his holdings to women but only under the circumstances that they were either unmarried or if married, divorced or separated from her husband, or a widow could hold the land in lieu of maintenance allowance (Section 157). A woman could also hold land in case if her husband was a lunatic or an idiot and a person who was incapable of cultivating by reason of blindness or other physical infirmity (Prakash, 1971). The women *bhumidhar* had no rights to bequeath her holding or any part of it; UPZALR, 1950, under sub- section (2) of Section 169 showed that,

*'No bhumidhar entitled to any holding or part in the right of a widow, mother, step-mother, father's mother, unmarried daughter, or unmarried sister, may bequeath by will such holding or part'.*

Therefore land rights could not be transferred by choice of the women landholders. There was strict enforcement of the law in distribution of the land holdings. In case of male landholders the transfer of land by will was also questionable. The owner was restricted in the sense that, sometimes, the rights were misused by the father or *karta* of the family. It was seen that this threat loomed in the minds of the sons and other descendants. Because if the *karta* went astray or due to his bad habits or loose character, wished to transfer the land recorded in his name by way of gift, sale or mortgage, then there should be some restrictions otherwise it would cause large-scale disintegration of families in rural areas (Agarwal, 1993).

As far as transferable rights in agricultural land were concerned, UPZALR, 1950 provided some concession to women. For this purpose Section 171, states that,

*"When a bhumindar, sirdar or asami being a male dies, his interest in holding shall devolve in accordance with the order of succession given below:*

*a) The male descendants in the male line of descent in equal shares per stripes...*

- b) Widow and widowed mother and widow of a predeceased male lineal descendant in the male line of descent, who have not remarried.*
- c) Father;*
- d) Unmarried daughter*
- e) Daughter's son*
- f) Brother, of the same father"*

The daughters retained the land as long as they remained unmarried, but after marriage they were separated from ownership of land and it descended to the brothers and to the next heir. This provision was strongly gender biased as daughters and widows had no right of inheritance when the sons were alive. Such scheme of inheritance showed that in comparison to a male, the female was not entitled to hold the agricultural land. Under this, the male lineal descendants in the male line of descent inherited equal shares. "The claims of a widow and unmarried and married daughters were preceded not only by the lineal male descendants in the line of descent, but even by their widows who have not remarried. The exclusion of the widows and the daughters could not be justified on any principle" (GOI, 1974).

In spite of great appreciation that the Act received for abolishing Zamindari system, it did not grant economic independence to farm women. Hence under this law a limited section of women received transferable rights in agricultural land and the large section of women

agricultural labourers were left without land. These women were economically the weakest section of the agricultural class. Most of the women labourers had marginal holdings, therefore their chief support for livelihood was labour. Women labourers sometimes got land to cultivate on sub-lease, but that too was small in area. The female labourers worked under many difficulties; they were ignorant, illiterate, unskilled and unorganized as well.

The UPZALR, 1950 only provided rights to a *bhumidhar*, *sirdar* and *asami*. However, there were no provisions made for a labouring class to be a *bhumidhar*. The criteria for acquiring *bhumidhar* rights had been made so intricate that it became almost impossible for poor female labourers to acquire land rights. The tenants could obtain *bhumidhar* tenancy on payment of a price equal to ten years of rent/ revenue as stated under Section 134 of UPZALR, 1950. Only a small portion of *sirdar* tenants exercised this option (Leaf, 1998).

It was observed that after the Land Reforms Act 1950, most agricultural land in Uttar Pradesh was legally inheritable principally by males, denying the rights of women to own land. Unmarried daughters and married minor daughters also did not receive any recognition in the land reforms. The daughters, married as well as unmarried, came even after the father, though between the daughters also, the unmarried ones

got preference. It was argued that daughters should not have a legal share in agricultural land because it would cause fragmentation of land holdings and because daughters also received dowry (Agrawal, 1997). The tenure holder was allowed to hold additional land on account of adult sons. Under the land devolution rules, any such land will ultimately pass to the sons.

The UPZALR Act, 1950 was further amended in 1952, 1954, 1956 and 1958 (Haque & Sirohi, 1986). But there was no change in the land rights of women. According to the general order of succession to agricultural holdings under the Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1954, the widow and widowed mother and widows of a pre-deceased male lineal descendant in the male line of descent acquired land till they were not married (Behari, 1971). The Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Act, 1950 was discriminatory in treatment of female heirs since the inheritance laws were not applicable to agricultural land.

Moreover, when the Uttar Pradesh Imposition of Ceiling on Landholdings Act of 1960 was passed with the objective to distribute land to the landless labourers, there were no specific provisions given to women (Arora and Singh, 2009). This law did not consider women for redistribution of agricultural land though there were few clauses intended to protect women's holdings [Section 3 (17)]. The UPZALR Act, 1950

also supported the notion that family land should pass from fathers to sons only. It encouraged male control over land rights by placing less value on the rights of daughters. Also the social customs pressurized daughters to surrender their share of inheritance of land to other male family members (*ibid*).

However, the land reform laws of Uttar Pradesh have very few protective clauses for women and very little efforts have been made to grant women access to land. Even though the women have full right to own agricultural land under the constitution which granted Right to Equality under Section 14 but, due to the patriarchal system and lack of independent financial resources, women rarely owned agricultural land.

#### **4.3 Inheritance Laws**

Equality in land rights is a significant element in women's economic empowerment. Providing land to women would empower them economically as well as strengthen their ability to challenge social and political gender inequalities. There were three major ways by which women could gain land, which included State transfers, inheritance and through market (Agarwal, 1998 a; Mishra, 2006; Sharma, 2006). While agricultural land in Uttar Pradesh formed the bulk of property, there was total denial of rights to women.

Tenancy rights in agricultural land were specifically exempted from two most important inheritance Laws which included the Muslim Personal law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956. It was surprising that, before the introduction of Agra Tenancy Act 1901, among Muslim community the tenancies passed according to the Muslim personal law. Therefore the daughters and widows of Muslim families inherited full rights over land. It was held that according to the 1901 Act, the widow's interest in a holding terminated by remarriage. But where she inherited the interest under the personal law (in Agra region prior to 1902) the position was that her interest did not terminate, if she was either, “(a) *Member of a community in which the widow inherits a full estate and not merely a life-estate from her husband (e.g. a Muslim widow) or (b) a member of a community in which widow remarriage has been permissible prior to, or independently of, the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856*” (Bilgrami, 1940).

The Islamic rules of succession were very sophisticated but a general principle that discriminated against women was that the inheritance of agricultural land was explicitly excluded from the scope of the Muslim Personal Laws. The Shariyat Application Act of 1937 which was applicable to Muslims in India did not give rights to women in



agricultural land under Section 2 (Cotula, 2002; Mishra, 2006; Devi, 2006, Sridhara *et al.*, 2009).

In Uttar Pradesh customs governing the devolution of agricultural land prevailed strongly according to the UPZALR, 1950, where the male lineal descendants in the male line of descent were typically the first order heir in the inheritance of agricultural land. Therefore, severe gender inequalities continued to characterize succession among Muslim women to the most important form of property rights. Bhatt (2008) stated that,

*“While the Shariat allows Muslim women to inherit agricultural property as full owners, the 1937 Act, as applicable in India, excludes Muslim women’s right to agricultural land”.*

In Uttar Pradesh the Shariyat Application Act of 1937 was not amended and the women’s inheritance in tenancy land depended on the state level tenurial laws, which specified an order of devolution that strongly favored male heirs. However studies showed that few southern States extended the Shariya Application Act to agricultural land and provided land rights to women. For example Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh amended the Act in 1949 and Kerela in 1963 (Cotula, 2002). Few other states like Maharashtra, Gujrat and West Bengal have also amended the inheritance laws (Mishra, 2006 and Bhatt, 2008).

Another inheritance law which could provide land rights to women was the Hindu Succession Act (HSA), 1956. This Act considered women as an equal and absolute owner of property, with full rights at her disposal. Although the HAS, 1956 gave complete independence to women for acquiring property rights, still the tenancy rights in agricultural land were exempted from the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. It left untouched the provisions of tenorial laws which dealt with the fixation of ceiling or the fragmentation of agricultural holdings, or the devolution of tenancy rights with respect to such holdings. Section 4 (2) of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, stated that,

*“Nothing containing in this Act shall be deemed to affect the provisions of any law for being in force providing for the prevention of fragmentation of agricultural holdings or for the fixation of ceiling or for the devolution of tenancy rights in respect of such holdings” (GOI, 1957).*

Thus legislation affecting women’s rights in certain categories of agricultural land varied from state to state, reflecting regional differences in social attitudes and in legal approaches. It has taken India nearly 50 years to eliminate gender inequalities from the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. The Hindu Succession Amendment Act (HSAA), 2005 was a landmark step in correcting gender inequality in property rights over agricultural land. This Act brought all agricultural land on par with other

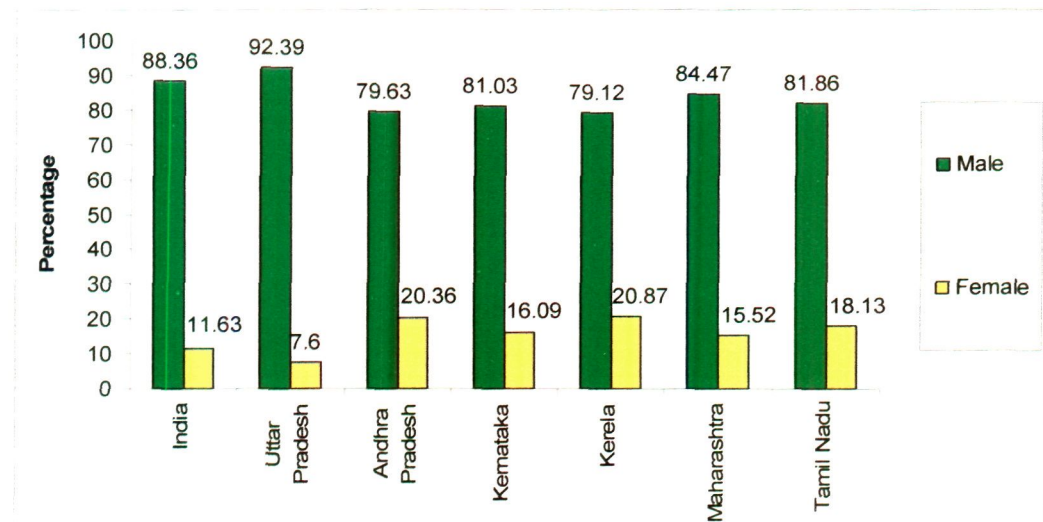
property and made Hindu women's inheritance rights in land legally equal to men's across states, overruling any inconsistency in state laws (Planning Commission, 2007). The second major achievement provided by the Act was that it also included daughters, especially married daughters, as co-parceners in joint family property.

Although majority of women in India will gain benefits from the HSAA, 2005, Muslim women's right to agricultural land continued to be unequal. It was found that many states responded in order to remove gender inequalities by taking measures for improving women's access to land and landed property. States like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh amended the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (GOI, 2009). This was clear from the fact that Kerala has the highest percentage of women holding agricultural land, followed by Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra (Fig. 8). In all these states the percentage of women's share in land was higher than the All-India level. The situation was worse in rest of the States and especially in Uttar Pradesh, where tenurial laws were completely against women (HDR, 2006). Uttar Pradesh has the lowest percentage of women land holders (Fig. 8).

Although U.P. was the only state which had the highest percentage of male land holders as compared to the rest of India. Uttar Pradesh is yet to take adequate steps to provide Constitutional safeguards to women's

right in agricultural land. In U.P the succession rules relating to agricultural land were different from the personal laws. Large numbers of women in agriculture were still landless In Uttar Pradesh (Arunachalam and Kalpagam, 2006; Gupta and Maiti, 2008).

**Figure 8. Percentage of Agricultural Land Individually held by Males and Females in various States in 2000-01**



Source: Agricultural Census, 2000 – 01  
 Note: the percentage was calculated for each State.

#### 4.4 Need and Importance of Land Rights

Land is not only a source of security, but also a source of food supplies and livelihood for poor women. Therefore, transfer of land in the name of women can provide economic strength and also a platform for exercising various income generating facilities (HDR, 2006). The Access and ownership of agricultural land may therefore help in improving women's condition. Landless women labourers in the context of this research referred to those women who do not have agricultural land of

their own but were engaged as casual labourers on other peoples lands. Since agricultural operations were seasonal, women remained under employed or unemployed in the non-agricultural seasons. During that time most of them were engaged as construction workers (Kumar & Varghese, 2008).

According to the Government Report (2008), women agricultural labourers in rural areas remained out of labour force for more days in a year, which was almost double of the men. Thus land rights could enhance the probability of finding supplementary wage employment and served as an asset base for rural non-farm activities.

Agricultural land not only provided direct benefits in terms of crop output, trees, fodder, fuel and garden produce but, also indirect benefits such as collateral credit or an asset which could be sold when needed (Sridhar *et al.*, 2009). It was also observed that, in the absence of land, the male agricultural labourers migrated to the neighboring states and big cities in search of better employment opportunities. The seasonality in agricultural operations was also a major reason for labourers' migration to other regions to look for work during the lean periods. Sen (1999) examined that, men migrated for the survival of their families and women migrated only in extreme conditions when there was hardly any work in the villages. Therefore, in the absence of male members the entire

responsibility of the household fell on females. As a result women bore the burden of poverty. In the absence of agricultural land a great deal of women's work was lost.

Agarwal (1994) gave four broad categories for the need for Independent Land Rights for women, which included Welfare, Efficiency, Equality and Empowerment. Giving land rights to women in the absence of males could enhance agricultural productivity by increasing women's access to credit, technology and information on improved agricultural practices. It also may motivate women to make long-term investments in the land. In addition, it would also strengthen their ability to challenge social and political gender inequities. Further, it was observed that, the ownership of land also provided security and support to old widows from their family members (Agarwal, 1998 b). In others words, owning land could directly improve the welfare of women.

The importance of land for agricultural women in Uttar Pradesh was reflected in the demand for land for themselves, so as to sustain their family needs (Gupta and Maiti, 2008). For instance, a woman named Indravati, in Machhlishahar village, District Jaunpur said, *"Our main demand is land. We should get at least 2 acres of land and along with that our daily wages should not be less than Rs.166/- per day (this amount was worked out by a group of women in a land issue workshop) If*

*we are provided with this much then only we can take care of our children and other family needs*". Another landless woman, Phuleshwari Devi, who worked as an agricultural worker in the Dalit Community, Village Pasai Kala, District Sonbhadra, said, "*Why there are poor and rich in this world. In order to reduce poverty, government should take all lands and distribute equally to all cultivating classes*".

In order to make the Land Reforms programmes an effective way for reducing gender disparities and for removal of poverty, the Uttar Pradesh Government, Department of Revenue, issued order number 104/1-2/95 number -2 on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1995 (Arora & Singh, 2009). The Department instructed all the District Magistrates to allot government land on the basis of joint *pattas* both to husband and wife under section 126 and 198 of the Zamindari Abolition Land Reform Act. These *pattas* were undisputed and were officially declared as ceiling surplus land. The receiver of these *pattas* was considered the direct tenant of the state (Mahapatra, 2006).

Although the government made efforts to allot joint *pattas* in the name of both men and women, there were certain loopholes. It was found that, the women were neither aware of the term '*joint patta*' nor about the government order that described 40 percent of the land settlement exclusively in the names of women and the remaining jointly in the

names of husbands and wife. Moreover, there were numerous cases where it was noticed that, the agricultural plots allotted to women were forcefully taken away by upper caste men. These women were threatened and misguided by the influential occupiers. Ram Devi, *Chamar* caste, village Harijanpur, Gonda district said, *“In our village 50 pattas for Kol and Scheduled Caste families were made 20 years ago. Till today no one has come to measure the plots. People have occupied lands and are cultivating them. We request that the plots be measured out so that we are saved the hassle of running from pillar to post”* (Jassal, 2001).

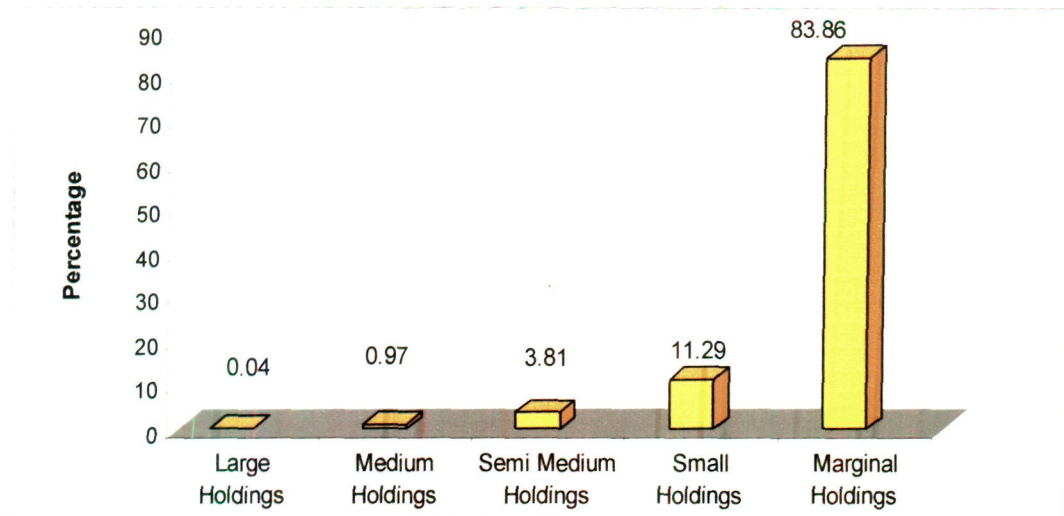
Even if women possessed land, most of the times such holdings were very small in size. These marginal holdings included those portions of land which were below 1 hectare. Large holdings were never given to women as they were considered inefficient in carrying out cultivation. Fig 9 shows that in U.P. only 0.04 per cent women have large holdings and about 83.86 per cent have marginal holdings which were insufficient for cultivation.

The domination of males over the resources never allowed women to come in the main stream of the production process. In June 2006, a campaign called “Aaroh” was launched, along with other organizations, in 10 districts of U.P. for recognition of women as farmers. A survey preceding this campaign covered 10 villages of these districts and 2,500



women farmers revealed that women were perceived as labourers and not as farmers (Velayudhan, 2009).

**Figure 9. Percentage of Operational Holdings of Females in Uttar Pradesh, 2000-01**



Source: Agricultural Census 2000-01.

Note: Percentage was calculated for each number of holdings, Large holdings consisted of 10hectare and above, Medium Holdings- 4 to 10ha, Semi-Medium Holdings- 2 to 4 ha, Small Holdings- 1 to 2 ha and Marginal Holdings- below 1 ha.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Although, the Land Reforms were enacted with a view to give better and improved rights to those who were within the ‘deprived’ category and also to the holders of limited rights. All the Acts however, only provided protection to women who were widows. In most cases women became landowners after the death of their husbands or because they had no brothers. The old age tradition of inheriting agricultural land by male members of the family deprived women to hold equal share in land. Sometimes the landholdings were so small that it became difficult for the male to share it with women members of the family.

Women who acquired land rights under UPZALR, 1950 received minimum rent due to ignorance. Moreover they found it difficult in supervising the lands which were located far from their houses. Women sometimes acted as mere caretakers of the land and were deprived of the rights to entitlement. They also faced lot of hardship and the social pressures restricted them from owning or declaring share in agricultural land. It was assumed that the widows were supposed to live on minimum supplies. Arora and Singh (2009) reported that, “a widow requires a *roti* (bread) and a *dhoti* (sari) to cover her body for the sustenance. If she gets this much then she does not need to ask for the rights to land and willingly surrenders it”. The statement showed that, women on being widowed were deprived of all the benefits and never claimed their individual rights but rather compromised with the given situation.

Majority of daughters inherited agricultural land only when there was no son in the family. They were not given share in agricultural land because of the notion that the daughters were given dowry at the time of marriage. The laws could only benefit women if the social system recognized them as individual units and provided them equal rights to men.

In the recently amended Hindu Succession Act, 2005, unmarried daughters were given the right to inherit agricultural land. However, this

still left a large proportion of women belonging to other communities and religions as landless. Moreover in Uttar Pradesh and few other states of north India, agricultural land was a state subject where land was not distributed according to the Inheritance Laws. Land inheritance and entitlement decisions were mainly taken by male members of the family, village and the revenue department. In such a socio-cultural situation, it was difficult for a woman to assert her land rights.

Land records and management in U.P. were found to be complex and ambiguous. In a rural set up, where literacy rate was very low and was worst in case of rural women, it was difficult for them to understand the laws and the provisions given under them. This emphasizes the importance of education and training as tools for women to know their rights and use their skills in a better way. Once they were educated they could become aware of their rights and the laws for ownership of land. Moreover information centers can provide all the necessary information for women and news updates regarding their right to agricultural land, bank loans, lease and mortgage of land, etc.

One of the primary objectives of the land reforms programme was to allocate land to the landless including women. Various organizations at the ground level can identify and enlist landless families. This may help in maintaining records and further help in redistribution of land among

women. These organizations may play an important role in allotment of *pattas* and by bringing women into the mainstream of land reforms. Also the land reforms must modify the rules and regulations according to the gender needs.

## Chapter V

### *Provisions for Women Agricultural Labourers in Wage Legislation*

## **PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN WAGE LEGISLATION**

Women have played a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a country. However, in India and its states, women have been subjected to growing inequalities as a result of discriminatory socio-economic practices. The situation was worse in the case of rural women working in agriculture sector. Women labourers in agriculture sector of Uttar Pradesh were not only got pushed into low wage jobs but they were even paid much lower remuneration than their male counterparts. The minimum wage legislations merely existed on paper for women as in real terms they received unequal wages compared to men.

In agriculture sector, women in general take up specific jobs which were not usually accepted or liked by male workers. It showed a tendency of discrimination towards women workers in the system of job segregation amongst agricultural labour force. For instance, the heavy and skilled tasks such as land preparation and ploughing were carried out by men only. While some tasks like weeding, watering and other lighter form of field work were carried out by women (Sen, 1999; Prakash, 2003; National Commission, 1988; Joeke, 1987; Punia, 1992; Saksena, 2004). Such job segregation had several consequences. It created a disparity in wage rates between male and female agricultural workers. The

reservation of high prestige and high wage jobs for men and low prestige and low wage jobs for women labourers in agriculture sector was continuously practiced. Such disparity and gender bias compromised with the bargaining power of women workers and reduced them to the state of marginal, irregular oppressed and unorganized labour class. This unorganized nature of women's work pattern in agricultural sector also restricted the wage laws to operate effectively and did not provide equal wages to them in this sector. Hence the agricultural women labourers constituted the most exploited segment of labourers and their level of employment and wages remained significantly low as compared to those of men in the agricultural labour market.

### **5.1 Defining Wages**

According to the first report of the United Provinces' Labour Enquiry Committee (1948), the term "wages" was defined as, "contract income, fixed or settled, as between employers and employees, where the latter sell labour power in lieu of money or goods or both".

Section 2 (h) of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 defined 'wages' as, "all remuneration, capable of being expressed in terms of money, which would, if the terms of the contract of employment, express or implied, were fulfilled, be payable to a person employed in respect of his employment or of work done in such employment".

Later the general report of the Labour Bureau (1959), defined ‘wages’ as, “remuneration for labour, and include payment in cash or kind and accordingly to the time-rate or piece-rate, or a combination of both these system of payments”.

Under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, ‘remuneration’ was defined as, “the basic wage or salary, and any additional employments whatsoever payable, either in cash or in kind, to a person employed in respect of employment or work done in such employment, express or implied, were fulfilled”.

## **5.2 Gender Disparity in Wages**

Although a marked disparity between the wages of men and women agricultural labourers existed, the official statistics for wages before independence however, did not give separate wages of male and female agricultural labourers. Moreover, the Prices and Wage series of India, 1908 also gave no information about the wages of women agricultural labourers. It was only the Official Gazetteers of the United Provinces that provided some information about the wages paid to women labourers.

Atkinson (1879) has given the rate of money wages paid by time of two *annas* per day for men and a quarter less for women agricultural labourers for reaping operation. Nevill (1907 b) has stated that women



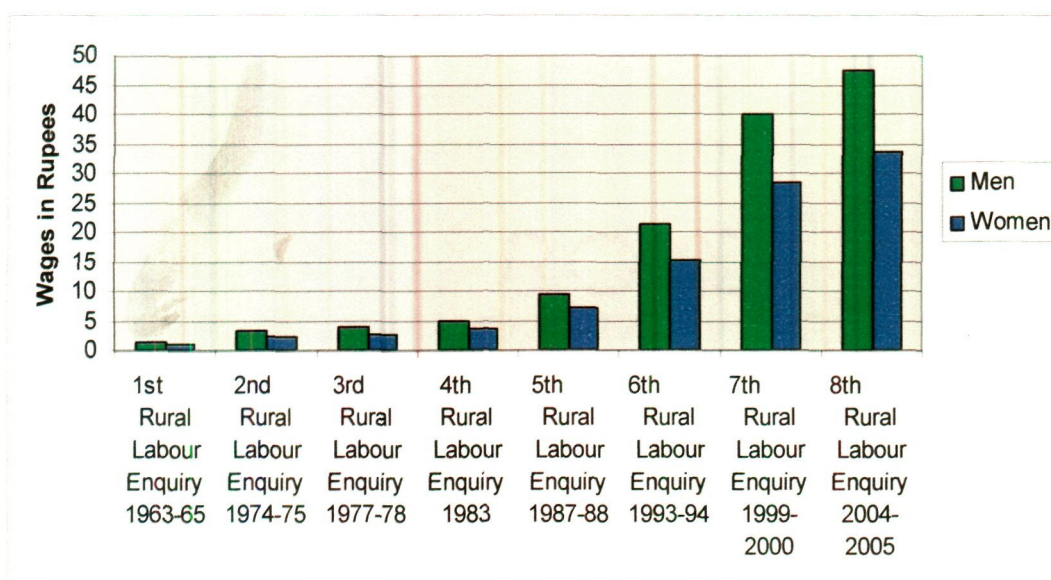
agricultural labourers were paid two-thirds of a man's wage. Brockman (1911) also stated that in agriculture women were remunerated at a smaller rate than the men. Sometimes the wages were given in cash along with food for a day. Men used to get money along with food whereas women were not provided with food since it was presumed that they cooked the food for the household.

Even after Independence men and women agricultural labourers continued to receive unequal wages, with men receiving higher wages than women. Although women were more efficient and were largely employed in certain agricultural activities such as cotton picking, rice pounding, weeding, etc., they were paid lower rates of wages than men (GOI, 1951). However, the general report of the Occupational Wage Survey (1958-59) stated that, *"Where employment is on piece-rates or where the work done by men and women is demonstrably identical no differentiation should be made between men and women workers regarding the wages payable"* (Labour Bureau, 1959).

Still there existed gender based inequality in agricultural wages. In order to recognise the need for sound data base during early years of independence the Government of India conducted the first Agricultural Labour Enquiry (ALE) in 1950-51, followed by the second Enquiry in 1956-57. Thereafter, the scope of the subsequent enquiries was extended

to cover all rural labour households. Hence, the third enquiry in the series known as the first Rural Labour Enquiry (RLE) was conducted in 1963-65 followed by seven successive enquiries in 1974-75, 1977-78, 1983, 1987-88, 1993-94, 1999-2000 and 2004-2005. It was revealed that, with every Successive Rural Labour Enquiry the difference between the average daily earnings of men and women had widened. During the First RLE the average daily wages of men were Rs 1.43 and for women they were only 0.95 *paise*. By 2004-2005 male agricultural labourers received Rs 47.53 while women received Rs 33.4 as their daily wages (Fig. 10).

**Figure 10. Average Daily Earnings of Male and Female Agricultural Labourers in India during 1963-65 to 2004-05 (In Rs)**



Source: GOI (2010), Rural Labour Enquiry, Report on Wages and Earnings of Rural Labour Households, Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Labour Bureau, Shimla, 2010. Annexure-I, 3, Wages and Earnings

As far as money wages paid to agricultural labourers were concerned, the GOI (1951) found that gender disparity in daily wages remained across all the states. In Uttar Pradesh the wages paid to men for

sowing were 1 rupee, 3 *anna* and 4 *paisa* while the women agricultural labourers received only 13 *anna* and 1 *paisa* respectively for performing the same agricultural operation. Difference also existed in wages paid for weeding, where males received 1 rupee, 2 *anna* and 1 *paisa* while the female labourers received only 11 *anna* and 11 *paisa* for the same weeding operations (Table 3). In the major states like Delhi, West Bengal, Bombay, Madras and Uttar Pradesh, the wages of female agricultural labourers were lower than that of male agricultural labourers.

**Table 3. Daily wages for Male and Female Agricultural Labourers in major States of India, 1949-50**

S.No	States	Men		Women	
		Sowing	Weeding	Sowing	Weeding
		Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.
1.	Uttar Pradesh	1 3 4	1 2 1	0 13 1	0 11 11
2.	Delhi	1 14 8	1 14 0	...	1 11 4
3.	West Bengal	1 10 2	1 9 4	1 10 0	1 5 8
4.	Bombay	1 1 5	0 14 3	0 10 8	0 10 2
5.	Madras	0 14 8	0 13 8	0 8 0	0 9 1

Source: GOI. (1951). The Indian Labour Year Book 1949-50, Table CXXXVI, p. 333.

Note: Rs- *Rupia*, A- *anna*, P- *paisa*

Wages for ploughing were however not included in this study as only men performed this specific agricultural operation. Ploughing continues to be the highest paid and male centered agricultural activity (Sen, 1999; Prakash, 2003).

Women agricultural labourers not only got unequal wages but also received wages below the minimum level of wages defined by Central & State governments under the minimum wage legislations. They were the worst affected unorganized labourers in the agriculture sector. The wage policy for the unorganized sector secured mainly through the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was oriented towards providing need based Minimum Wages. The Constitution of India accepted the responsibility of the state with the view to create an economic order in which every citizen received a fair wage by enacting the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 (GOI, 2011).

### **5.3 The Minimum Wages Act, 1948**

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was the only statutory legislation which ensured minimum wages to workers in agriculture and worked as a protection law against exploitation by the employers. The concept of Minimum Wages was first given by the Indian Labour Organization in 1928 in order to provide minimum benchmarks of wages in those industries where the level of wages were substantially low and labour was vulnerable to exploitation, and not well organized and thus lacked effective bargaining power.

Passed by the Indian Dominion Legislature, the Minimum Wage Bill came into force on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1948. As per the Act both the State and Central governments were responsible for fixing and revising the

minimum rates of wages for employment covered under the Act. This Act also stated that, the employment in agriculture included any form of farming; it comprised cultivation and tilling of the soil, dairy farming, production cultivation, growing and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodity, raising of live-stock, bees or poultry, and any practice performed by the farmer or on a farm as incidental to or in conjunction with farm operations. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was one of the most important wage related laws enacted after Independence. Under the Act both State and Central Governments were appropriate authorities for fixing the minimum rates of wages for the labourers.

“Wages in the organized sector are determined through negotiations and settlements between employer and employees. In unorganized sector, where labour is vulnerable to exploitation, due to illiteracy and lack of effective bargaining power, minimum rates of wages are fixed/ revised both by Central and State Governments in the scheduled employments falling under their respective jurisdictions under the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948” (ILO, 2006).

In Uttar Pradesh the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was implemented in 1954. According to the report of the National Commission on Agriculture (1976) in U.P. the minimum wage fixed for unskilled workers in agriculture sector was Rs 1.00 during the year 1954. The Minimum

Wages Act, 1948 gave full powers to the State Governments for fixing minimum rates of wages according to:

- i) Different scheduled employment;
- ii) Different classes of work in the same scheduled employment;
- iii) Adults, adolescents, children and apprentices; and
- iv) Different localities.

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 also stated that wages payable under the Act were to be paid in cash. But in case of agricultural operations, payments could be made partly in cash and partly in kind. It was important to note that the value of the payment in kind should be equal to the value of wages in cash. If the wages of agricultural workers were given in the form of grains then the total value of the non-cash remuneration must, when added to the cash payment, add up to at least the minimum wage (Saksena, 2004).

The Minimum wages were supposed to be revised periodically at an interval of maximum 5 years. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 specified that reviews/revisions of minimum wages in the scheduled 16 employments were to be undertaken at intervals not exceeding five years. The National Commission on Labour (1969) recommended that this period should be reduced to two years. At the 31st Session of the Labour

Ministers' Conference held in July, 1980, it was concluded that minimum rates of wages must be reviewed and revised if necessary, within a period of not exceeding two years or on rise of 50 points in the Consumer Price Index Number, whichever was earlier. An amendment proposal to provide for revision of minimum wages every two years where the minimum wage was not linked to Consumer Price Index was under consideration of the Government (*ibid*).

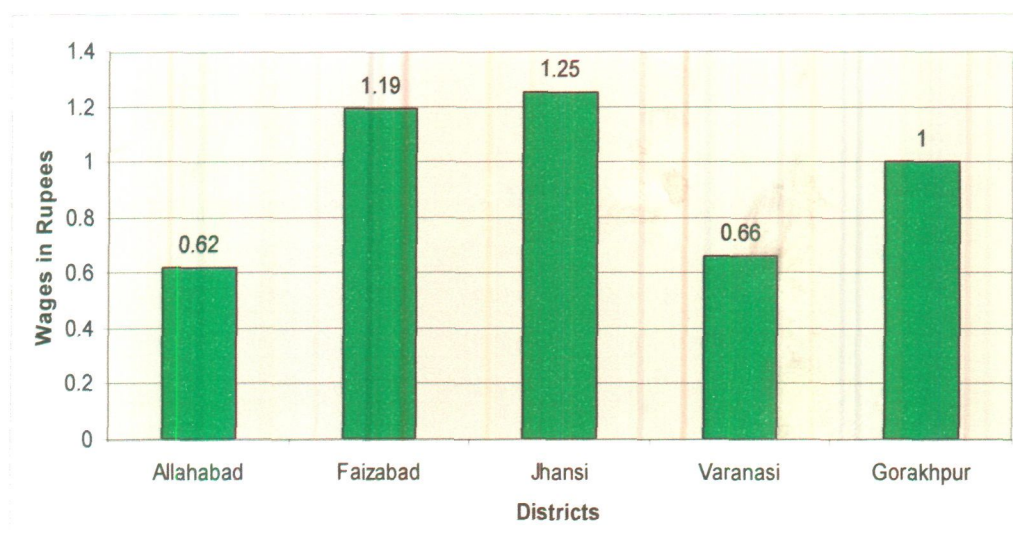
#### **5.4 Regional Disparity in Wages**

The other most serious and discriminating problem faced by women in India was the wide disparity in agricultural wages not only across different states but also across different districts in the states. In Uttar Pradesh too there was disparity in agricultural wages among female labourers. There was no standard wage rate fixed by the government which would ensure equitable distribution of wages to women across the districts, for performing similar agricultural operations.

According to the Agricultural wages of India (1960-61) money wages were as low as Rs 0.66 (Fig. 11) in Varanasi, which was largely an urban and industrialized district. With majority of working population engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors. While the money wages of women were found to be higher in less industrialized districts where most of the working population was employed in agriculture sector viz.

Faizabad (Rs 1.19), Jhansi (Rs 1.25) and Gorakhpur (Rs 1.00) (Fig. 11). However district Allahabad was an exception as despite a large percentage of labour force being employed in agriculture sector, the wages were even lower than those of Varanasi district i.e., Rs 0.62.

**Figure 11. Daily Money Wages for Female Labourers in Uttar Pradesh for Sowing Operation during 1960-61**



Source: Agricultural wages In India 1960-61, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Food & Agriculture.

Note: the values were only available for Allahabad, Jhansi, Varanasi, Faizabad and Gorakhpur districts.

This showed that wages varied not only between highly industrialized and less industrialized districts but also among districts with similar economic structure. It was also found that in all the districts money wages received by women agricultural labourers were below the prescribed minimum wage level, which was Rs 1.50 to 1.80 in 1961 (GOI, 1976).

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 only provided a mechanism for fixing and revising minimum rates of wages but did not give any



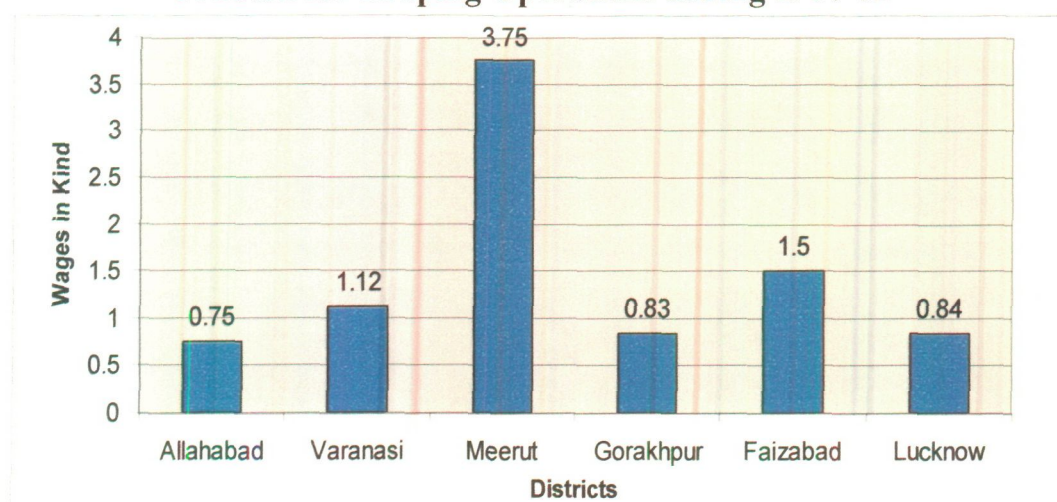
guidelines for fixing the minimum wages (National Commission, 1988). The wages were not fixed according to the specific agricultural operations. And a standard wage rate was fixed for the unskilled agricultural labourers separately, without prescribing rates for different agricultural operations like sowing, weeding, reaping, transplanting, etc.

The payment of wages particularly in respect of agriculture could be made partly in cash and partly in kind in the form of food grains, with specific option of the worker concerned to receive part of the wages in kind. It was observed that women received better and higher wages when paid in kind than when wages were paid in cash (Fig. 12).

In Varanasi the wages when paid in kind for reaping were equivalent to Rs 1.12 while the money wages for sowing were Rs 0.66 (Fig 10). The highest wage for performing reaping operation was Rs 3.75 (in Meerut), which was even above the minimum wage (Fig. 12).

Regional wage differences among female labourers existed not only in money wages but also at the time of payment made in kind for a particular operation. They differed from one district to another when the wages were paid in kind.

**Figure 12. Daily Wages in Kind for Female Labourers in Uttar Pradesh for Reaping Operations during 1960-61**



Source: Agricultural wages In India 1960-61, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Food & Agriculture.

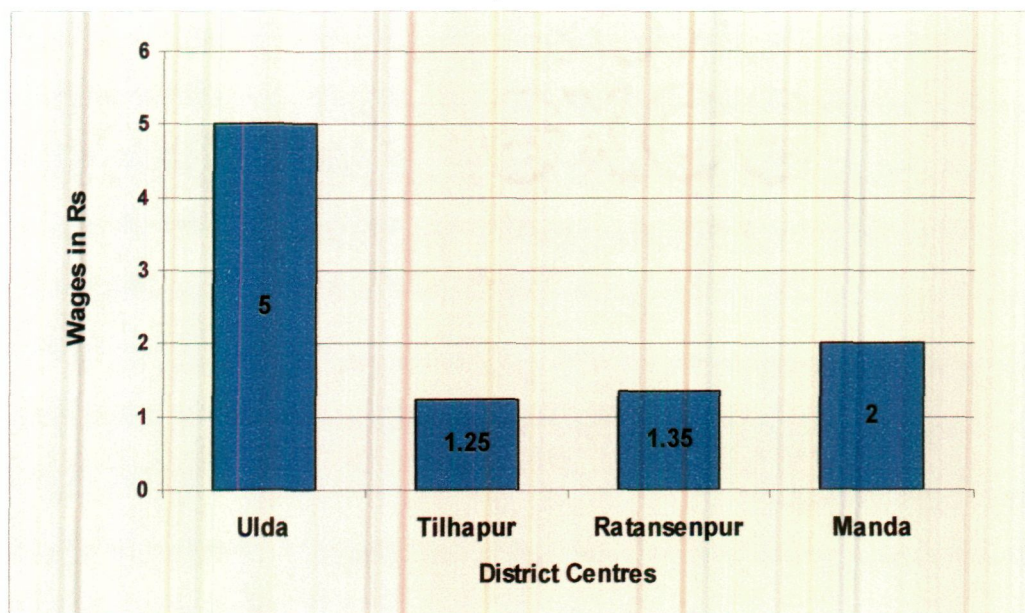
Note: The values were only available for Allahabad, Jhansi, Varanasi, Meerut, Gorakhpur, Faizabad and Lucknow districts.

The Shramshakti Report (1988) emphasized the need for ensuring correct quantities and right quality of wage distribution in kind. It was further stated that the food grains should be valued at the wholesale prices in the nearest *mandi* or the subsidized prices at which these are supplied in programmes like 'Food for Work'. While fixing the minimum wages, the basic minimum needs of the workers and his/her family for sustenance should be kept in view so as to enable him/her at least to cross the poverty line.

However the existing variations in the agricultural wages for carrying out sowing and reaping operations showed that the Planning Commission guidelines were not followed and the employers fixed the rates of women's wage rates according to their own choice. This

indicated that women faced discriminatory practices where employers treated female agricultural labourers differently (Singh, 1996). Since women were vulnerable and lacked appropriate knowledge about the wages fixed by government, they were exploited by such employers. Hence the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 failed to provide sufficient wages to women agricultural labourers.

**Figure 13. Daily Agricultural Wages of Female Harvesters in Allahabad in March, 1972**



Source: Agricultural wages in India, 1971-71, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture & Irrigation, 1975

Female wage differences were found, not only in all the districts but also among different centers of a district. For example during 1971-72, the daily wages for women harvesters in the month of March were uneven in all the four different centers in Allahabad district (Fig. 13). The wages of female workers were also not similar across regions. This showed that the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, provided a disproportionate



wage rate among female agricultural labourers from one region to another.

### **5.5 Gender Division in Wages**

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 failed as a wage protection mechanism as it did not provide equal wages to men and women and also failed to provide a uniform wage rate among women labourers across different regions of U.P. According to Roy (2008) the data for wages paid to agricultural labourers during 1970s revealed that only male agricultural labourers in Western Uttar Pradesh received notified minimum wages. The female agricultural labourers however, did not receive remuneration as per the notified minimum wages. This was because of the fact that women were treated mainly as subordinate helpers or labourers (National Commission, 1988; Kansara, 1995). Moreover, the U.P. government was unfair in fixing the Minimum Wage rates by discriminating against women (GOI, 1974).

Table 4 gives the maximum and minimum wages of men and women for similar agriculture operations in Uttar Pradesh. Apart from the difference in wages for the same jobs, discrimination against women was also demonstrated by the fact that they were frequently engaged in traditionally lower ranking jobs, viz. sowing, weeding, transplanting, winnowing and threshing against ploughing which was done mostly by

men (*ibid*). Thus men received more wages as their jobs were graded higher in agriculture (Kelkar, 1995).

**Table 4. Agricultural Wages of Male and Female Workers in Uttar Pradesh (1971)**

	Sowers		Weeders		Reapers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Maximum	66.56	47.70	60	42.8	52.6	42.85
Minimum	11.27	9.75	11.23	10.16	8.87	8.07

Source: Government of India, 1974, Towards Equality, Report of The Committee On The Status Of Women In India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, New Delhi. Table XIII , p.165.

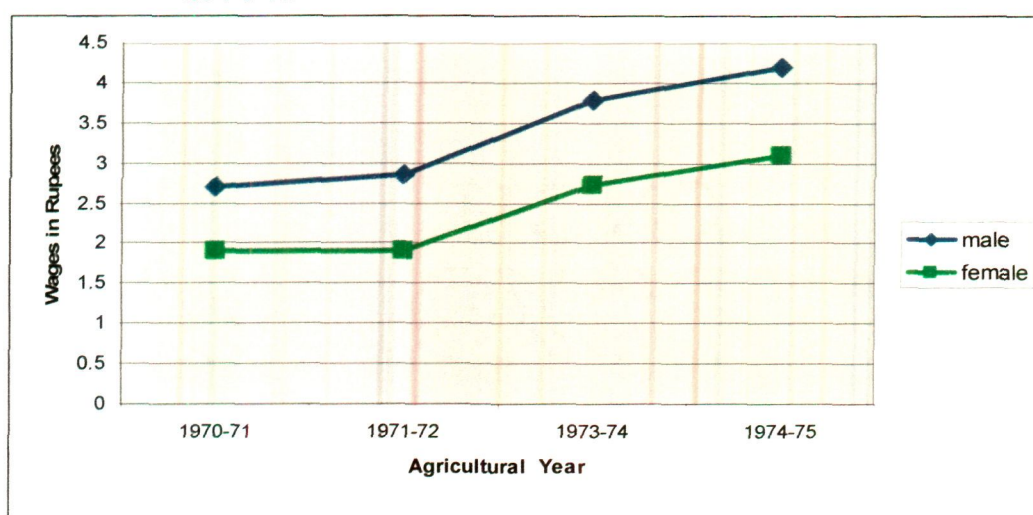
Note: Values in Rupees.

The disparity among the wages of male and female workers increased from 1970-71 to 1974-75 (Fig 14). This was also because there was no check on the wages paid by employers. Although, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 imposed penalties under its section 22 but, very little information was available about the penalties given to employers who did not obey the rules. Hence the mechanism for fixation and enforcement of minimum wages was not successful.

The National Commission on labour also criticized the inadequate implementation of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. According to the Commission the reason for this, was poverty and illiteracy of agricultural labourers, the casual nature of their employment and their ignorance of

the law, all of which applied particularly to women (GOI, 1974). Women agricultural labourers were illiterate and unskilled and therefore had no alternative employment opportunities.

**Figure 14. Trends in Money Wage Rates of Male and Female Agricultural Labourers in Uttar Pradesh from 1970-71 to 1974-75**



Source: Data for the figure has been taken from Jose, A. V. (1988) Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.23, No.26 (Jun.25, 1988), Agricultural Wages in India. Table 3B and 4B

These unorganized women worked for longer hours without any guarantee of six days of full employment in a week due to seasonality of agricultural work. They were forced to accept low wages as they had no alternatives and would otherwise starve (Ranadive, 1976). The wages of agricultural labourers were not revised regularly and realistically under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Even where the state governments revised them, they were not implemented properly because of the unorganized nature of agricultural work (Pandey, 1977).



## 5.6 Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

The Indian Labour Organization passed a Convention in 1951, called “Equal Remuneration Convention” (No.100), the full title of which was “Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work for Equal Value”. In view of this convention and in order to implement the guidelines of the Directive Principle of equal pay for equal work, Article 39(d) and Article 14 of the Constitution of India, the Equal Remuneration Ordinance was propagated in 1975. The ordinance was subsequently replaced by the Equal remuneration Act, 1976 (Saksena, 2004). The preamble of the Act stated that, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was intended to provide equal payment to men and women workers. It was designed to prevent discrimination on the ground of sex, against women in matter of employment.

This Act imposed a statutory obligation on the employer to prevent discrimination against women in terms of payment of remuneration to them. It also ensured equality in respect of terms and conditions of women’s employment in comparison to their male counterparts. The fundamental principle behind the Equal Remuneration Act was that men and women doing similar work must get equal wages.

According to this Act, “same work or similar work” indicated that work in respect of which the skills, efforts, and responsibility required

were the same, when performed under similar working conditions by a man or a woman and the differences, if any, between the skills, efforts and responsibility required of a man and those required of a woman are not of practical importance in relation to the terms and conditions of employment (Section 2, h). The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was applicable in the entire country. The list of classes of employment listed in the schedule under this Act was extensive and included industries from the formal and informal sectors. The provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, were also extended to agriculture (Mediratta, 2009).

This Act also laid down that, no employer would pay any worker a remuneration, whether payable in cash or kind, rates less favorable than those at which remuneration was paid by him to the worker of the opposite sex for performing the same work or work of similar nature (Section 2, g). The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 did not cover self-employed workers like unpaid women workers in farming, households and in the unorganized sectors in large number.

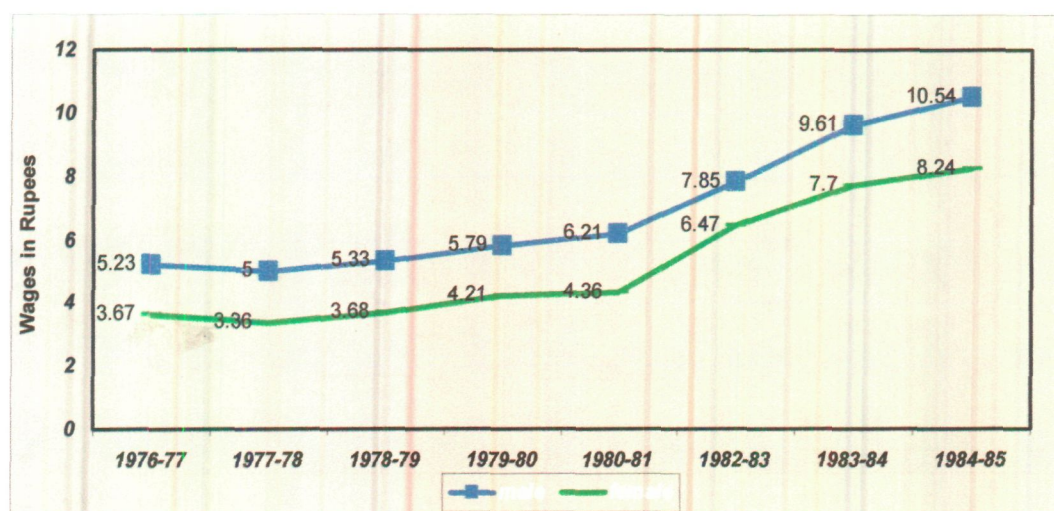
Till 1975, there was no specific legal provision mandating payment of equal wages to women even though discrimination against women in the payment of wages was widespread. Such discrimination was practiced not only by the private employers but also practiced by the state as well,



although the State made various provisions for providing equal wages to males and females for doing similar operations in agriculture.

Thus in practice these laws proved ineffective because even after the commencement of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 the female agricultural labourers still faced wage discrimination in Uttar Pradesh. Moreover the National Commission on Labour had found that in agriculture, where women were largely employed some state governments had been fixing differential wage rates. The Agricultural wages in India showed that despite the Wage Laws, gender based wage discrimination kept on increasing in Uttar Pradesh (Fig. 15).

**Figure 15. Trends in Money Wage Rates of Male and Female Agricultural Labourers in Uttar Pradesh from 1976-77 to 1984-85**



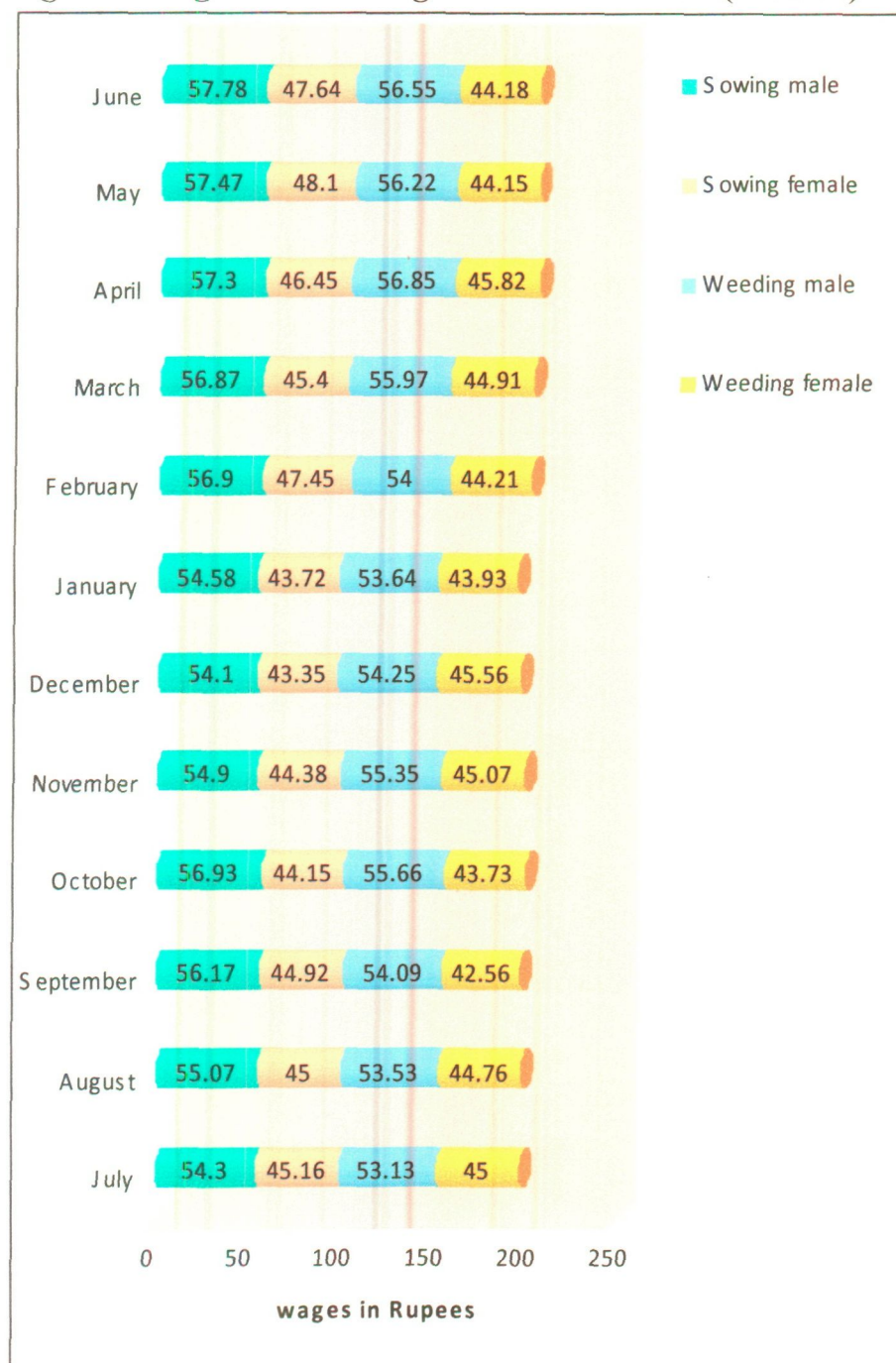
Source: Data for the figure has been taken from A.V. Jose, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.23, No.26 (Jun.25, 1988) Agricultural Wages in India. Table 3B and 4B

Kelkar (1995) conducted a study on the wages of agricultural labourers in district Etawah and found that in the villages the female

labourers generally received wages one third less than male labourers. Although with every passing year the wages of agricultural labourers increased, but they were always unequally distributed among male and female labourers. For example, the Agricultural Wages of India (2001-02) that gave the daily wage rates for agricultural occupations in the agricultural year July 2001 to June 2002 indicated that lower wages were being paid to women labourers as compared to men (Fig. 16).

Wages received by women for sowing and weeding operations were Rs 48.1 and Rs 45.82 respectively and were less than the wages received by males for same activities viz. Rs 57.78 and Rs 56.85 respectively. Also the minimum rates of wages were unequal as women received as less as Rs 42.56 and Rs 43.35 and men received Rs 53.13 and Rs 54.1 for weeding and sowing respectively. In 2002 the statutory minimum wage rate for agricultural labourers was fixed at Rs 58. Figure 16 shows that wages for both male and female labourers were however lower than the minimum wage rate which is fixed to Rs 58. Although, the wages of male labourers were somewhere near the minimum wage rate, but the wages of female agricultural labourers were far below the minimum level and also far less than those of their male counterparts.

**Figure 16. Agricultural Wages in Uttar Pradesh (2001-02)**



Source: Data for the figure were taken from Agricultural Wages in India 2001-02, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, New Delhi.

Note: All the values are in Rupees.

According to the Agricultural Wages of India 2001-02 and 2006-07, women in Uttar Pradesh received unequal wages in almost all agricultural operations which were performed by both men and women. The GOI

Report (2008) stated that, “The casual agricultural workers in the rural areas were worse off compared to non-agricultural workers with nearly 87 per cent of the men and 97 per cent of the women receiving wages below the national minimum”.

One of the reasons for unequal distribution of wages to the women labourers was that, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, did not impose a duty on the employers to check if the work of men and women were of similar nature or not (Mediratta, 2009). There was no procedure according to which such evaluations could be made operational. Therefore these significant disparities in the wages of men and women employed in agriculture operations resulted in exploitation of women workers.

Gender differentials in wages were an accepted feature of rural Uttar Pradesh. Owing to the absence of uniformity in wages, employers were relatively free to evolve their own ratios within certain broad parameters, the prevailing labour market and availability of labour in the region, pitching the terms of the labour contract usually in favor of the employer.

According to a study by Ray (2005) in eastern Uttar Pradesh while men on an average received Rs 50 for a day's work, women got little more than Rs 30 for the same kind of work. An accepted rule of the

thumb was that the employer fixed the wages for women at least 20 per cent below that of men. The justification given in support of the differentiation between wages of males and females was that, wage of a male worker should be based on the needs of a family that consisted of self, wife and children. While the average female worker had only herself to support and her needs were fewer than those of the average adult male worker and his dependent family members.

Ray (2005) further indicated that in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh, women were still paid in kind whereas the men got wages in cash. Women received a wage amounting to a grain measure of *panchpaw* (1½ kg) while the men received anything between Rs 20 to Rs 30, which was below the minimum wage. In parts of Jaunpur district where wages were paid in kind even to men they amounted to 3 kg of wheat or 5 kg of rice for harvesting operations. In many areas of Jaunpur however wages for women were fixed at 2 ½ *seer* wheat. In the Eastern Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh, wages for women varied from 2 ½ kg to 3 kg of grain and 5 kg of grain for men for potato cultivation.

Hence despite the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 there existed wide disparities in wages of men and women, both in kind and cash. It also appeared that even in areas where men's wage agreements included meals; the employers did not



provide the same for women. The arguments behind this were that women brought their own packed lunches; they also observed communal taboos and were unlikely to eat with other caste members and they preferred to go home and cook their meals. There was also a wrong notion that women worked only half a day and that men's work being much harder, men deserved a meal.

All these arguments were controversial and served to conceal a discriminatory wage policy which received legitimacy from the state's uncommitted enforcement of the minimum wages. One of the main reasons for the miserable condition of women workers in agriculture was that they lived in scattered villages, worked in an unorganized set up and there were no organizations and labour unions to raise their voices. However, in urban areas, workers had unions and organizations to fight for their rights. Due to these factors, farm workers did not have enough say to plead with the farmers and land owners in order to secure remunerative wages or the minimum wage rate for their labour.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

There was widespread gender discrimination in agricultural wages due to various reasons. Although the Government provided laws to determine wages of agricultural labourers, there was uneven distribution of wages across regions. The Wage Legislation Acts of 1948 and 1976

were designed to provide adequate and equal wages to men and women workers, however they were highly discriminatory. The objective of the Wage Laws to guarantee equal wages to both men and women for equal work was not implemented. As a result women labourers in the agriculture sector remained under paid and sometimes unremunerated.

The poor condition of women employees has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), also known as 'Towards Equality', and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women. The Committee on the Status of Women in India stated that in order to improve the unequal status, there should be increase in the employment opportunities and earning power of women workers in agriculture. This Committee observed that most of the women did not have access to the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the Constitution of India.

Women's unequal status within the households was reinforced by persistent wage disparity between women and men for the same agricultural operations. In Uttar Pradesh, the development process was highly male-centered. The males were recognized as unitary heads and decision-makers, this actually legitimized and reinforced lower wages for women. Against this background, the state's assertion of equal wages for

males and females, appeared weak and unconvincing and was unlikely to be operational.

Apart from the differentials in wages for the same job, discrimination against women was strengthened by having lower rates for the jobs traditionally done by women, viz. sowing, weeding, transplanting, winnowing, threshing and harvesting, as against ploughing, which was normally done by men only.

The other factor that contributed to the low wages of women in agriculture was the practice of identifying a work-day as equivalent of 7 to 9 hours. Many women were unable to report for duty on time because of household responsibilities, and did not get the full rates of wages. Moreover, agricultural labourers lost the daily wages whenever they remained absent due to illness (Kumar and Varghese, 2008). This led to wage differences among the wage rates of male and female agricultural labourers.

Furthermore, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, did not impose a duty on the employers to evaluate whether the work of women and men was not of similar nature, nor did it establish any institutional procedure by which such evaluations would be made. It is high time that the advisory committees under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, start functioning efficiently to yield the desired results.



The Committee should function as a watchdog panel. It should play an innovative role and should be vested with some authority and powers to question the discrimination and disparity against women employees. It should comprise of dynamic individuals, having knowledge of the issues of women workforce, labour laws and the economy in general. It is also important that the implementation aspect of the wage laws is constantly monitored from time to time so as to genuinely accomplish the goals for which they have been enacted. Female officers should be appointed for registering the complaints of women workers in order to avoid any form of gender based discrimination.

Indian agriculture no doubt is sustained on the strength of rural women who constantly work on and off farm but they have been poorly rewarded in terms of income, access to resources and decision-making power. Equal pay laws alone will not be able to remove gender wage differentials, since these laws were complexly bound up with occupational segregation. This, in turn, is linked to gender relationship and roles that are fixed by patriarchal norms and values. This attitude needed to be changed in order to provide better employment opportunities to women. It is important now to provide equal wages to female labourers as well as resources such as land, assets, credit and suitable share in the agricultural income to the unpaid women workers in the family farms. Also women needed to be recognized as farmers and must be given their due share.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In most underdeveloped and developing economies, agriculture is the mainstay of a large proportion of the population. Moreover, women in these economies also play an important role in this sector. However, unfortunately they are not given equal status to the men engaged in agriculture. Women working in agricultural sector in India are no exception, as was seen in this study. The study examined the role and status of women in agricultural work in Uttar Pradesh. The study also reconstructed the role of women in agriculture from pre-independence era to the present.

In spite of the fact that, Uttar Pradesh is the most populous and primarily agricultural state, women's role in agriculture sector was found to be highly invisible. Although women have been performing an important role in the agricultural sector they have always remained invisible due to traditional values, gender biases, illiteracy, superstition, dominant role of males in decision making, etc.

Though women agricultural workers in U.P. represented a big proportion of all women workers, they continued to receive lower wages than men. While earnings from agricultural work had not improved for women, modernization of agriculture had in some cases brought new kinds of problems and demand. They were also the largest group of

landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce. Inheritance laws and customs also discriminated against women. The land reforms and settlement programmes too usually gave land rights and the security needed for obtaining credits for production to the male in the family. Unfortunately agricultural development programmes were usually planned by men for male farmers as the focus group.

It was also found that the condition of women agricultural workers and their problems were different from that of workers in the organized sector. Women agricultural labourers have been mostly employed in the most arduous field work like sowing, weeding and transplanting since pre-independence period. The agricultural work was distributed according to caste and sex of the workers. Lower caste women were actively involved in field work. Some of these castes were the *Kachchi*, *Koris*, *Kurmis*, *Chamar*, *Passi* and *Dhobi*. Women of these castes worked as agricultural labourers along with their husbands. Even though these women actively participated in agriculture but the work they did was considered inferior and repetitive.

The use of plough was controlled by men. Moreover there were social restrictions that forbade women from using the plough in the fields. A woman was never allowed to plough the fields as the plough was

considered to be the most auspicious tool and was held in high esteem. Technological innovations and modernization in farming also left women's work untouched. Ironically, the only implements that women used continue to be traditional hand tools and were mostly employed in tasks which were non-mechanized.

Compared to their male counterparts, women agricultural workers got lesser employment opportunities. They were not the main income earning members of the families, and were ready to work as an additional earner in the family; moreover the availability of work was also not regular. Other than agriculture rural women were engaged in child nursing, family activities and household work like animal husbandry. The main problem of female agricultural labourers in pre-independent India was lower wage rate and lack of employment opportunities.

After independence the condition of women agricultural workers continued to be the same or even worsened in some cases. Lower caste women performed majority of farm work and the *purdah* system which restricted women's movement was still prevalent in the society. Even after more than six decades since independence women continue to occupy a secondary position in agriculture.

Women in post-independent India have continued to be excluded from the use of new farm technologies. Moreover modern machines took

over the work that was previously done by women workers. Most of the female agricultural labourers were unskilled therefore they were given only those tasks where mechanization was not possible. For instance transplanting operations remained the domain of women labourers and was done manually by hands.

Agricultural women labourers not only lacked the use of advanced technology but they also had no rights to the agricultural holdings. Uttar Pradesh incidentally had the lowest number of women with agricultural lands in their names. The tradition of inheriting agricultural land by male members of the family deprived women of an equal share in land. The Land Reform Acts were highly discriminatory in considering women as land holder. Moreover, all the land reform Acts only provided protection to widowed or unmarried women. Although women sometimes acted as caretakers of the land, they were deprived of the entitlement rights to the agricultural land. They also faced lot of social pressures which restricted them from owning or declaring a share in agricultural land.

Access to productive resources such as land, credit, inputs, appropriate technology, training and extension services have remained insufficiently available to women. On the other hand, males held most of the resources, but this did not mean that all men had greater access to the resources. An upper caste man was highly privileged in the society

because he was both a man and a person of a dominant caste, but a scheduled caste man did not gain better access to all the resources in agriculture. However, women faced discrimination not only for being a weaker sex, but also for belonging to the lower castes.

Agricultural work was highly gendered as ploughing, watering, fertilizer application or marketing agriculture produce were distinctively men's activities. Women were mostly found weeding, transplanting, cleaning the cattle shed and raising calves. In contrast, men mostly performed core tasks. Their work involved more skill and knowledge and therefore gave them greater power and gave them a place even beyond the household. It was found that men and women had different role in the socio-economic scenario.

Women's domain was an extension of the home and the skills required to manage it. Their social boundaries were also restricted, which affected their mobility. The situation of women agricultural labourers was both grim and pathetic. These women worked hard in the fields, at wages which were lower than those paid to men. There was division of labour between sexes and a striking difference in the work done by men and women. Women's work was also ranked low and given lesser value while men's work was considered more superior to women.

In Uttar Pradesh the male-centered development ideology, recognized males as unitary heads and decision-makers; this legitimized and reinforced lower wages for women. Against this background, the state's assertion of imparting equal wages for both men and women agricultural labourers, appeared weak and unconvincing and was not operational.

Apart from the differentials in wages for same jobs, discrimination against women was strengthened due to lower rates for the jobs traditionally done by women, viz. sowing, weeding, transplanting, winnowing, threshing and harvesting, as against ploughing, which was normally done only by men. The other factor that led women to receive lower wages in agriculture was due to the practice of considering a work-day as equivalent to 7 to 9 hours. Many women were unable to report for duty on time because of household responsibilities, and did not get the full rates of wages. Even Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 did not provide adequate and equal wages to women agricultural labourers.

The problems that women agricultural workers faced were numerous. Since their work was mostly in unorganized sector they, did not receive the benefits received by workers in the organized sector. There were no medical health care facilities available to women

agricultural labourers. Both men as well as women had serious health problems while working in agricultural fields. However women were likely to be affected more than men due to biological factors such as their menstrual cycle, reproductive function and menopause. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 was also not applicable in the agriculture sector. Women's exposure to a variety of pesticides was also associated with spontaneous abortions, premature births, low birth weights, and birth defects. However, there were no government records which monitored the health of women in the unorganized sector.

Women also faced the brunt of poverty and were under double burden. They worked more than men but earned less than men. Under distress situations like male migrations, women were forced to take over the tedious tasks of farm management and household responsibilities alone. Migration of males in search of better-paid work, forced women to take over agricultural work in the absence of males. In such situations women faced meager wages, long working hours and hazardous work.

Women also had lesser access to information technology because of their inferior educational status and relative isolation from public life. Women were mostly ignored and were not taken seriously because of the male centric society. There is a need to bring about change in the attitude



of men and only then women can avail the benefits provided by the government.

The empowerment of women can help them determine their own actions, and have the freedom to make decisions and guide their future. This power in decision making could be acquired and exercised if, they have knowledge about the various programmes, plans and current issues, access to social policies and their rights. The Government schemes and programs must be women-centric and should have a gendered approach. Therefore in order to change the plight of women agricultural workers the following recommendations were made.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations have been made on the basis of main findings of the study. They have been divided into four broad categories.

#### **a) Knowledge and Information**

- i. Women's role in agriculture should be duly recognized and they should be given equal participation in decision-making. This will make farming a joint venture for both men and women.
- ii. Opening up information centers that could provide all the necessary information to women and updated news regarding their

right to agricultural land, bank loans, lease and mortgage of land, etc.

- iii. Education and training are important tools for women to know their rights and use their skills in the most efficient manner. Government should create conditions conducive for female education. For this purpose night schools should be arranged near their dwelling places. Once they are educated they can become aware of their rights and the laws for ownership of land.
- iv. There should be new employment opportunities for women during the off season. For example dairying, employment in agro- based industries, making jams and jellies and pickles, etc.

#### **b) Technology**

- i. There is a need for development of agricultural technologies that may help women. The tools and equipment used in agriculture should also be designed according to the needs and requirements of women farmers.
- ii. Women's skills in agriculture could be improved by encouraging them to utilize new agricultural techniques. Other specific steps that can be used are by promoting technologies that help to alleviate the drudgery of women's household chores.

- iii. Proper training should be provided to women farmers for operating advance farming equipments like tractors, threshers, harvesters. Social barriers which restricted women from using the advance machines should be removed.

**c) Role of State and Women's Organizations**

- i. There should be a special cell in each village/block where women agricultural labourers could register their problems.
- ii. Female officers should be appointed for registering the complaints of women workers in order to avoid any form of gender based discrimination in wages.
- iii. The wage rates for women agricultural labourers should be increased and should be made equal with the male wage rates. Moreover, there should be a mechanism to verify that women labourers are receiving equal wages or not. Any negligence should be treated as a serious offence.
- iv. Maternity leave facilities, rest places, sanitation and day care facility for children should be provided at the workplaces. Women should also be provided nutritious food, primary medical help and educational facility.

- v. Active role of non government organizations for allotment of *pattas* to landless women workers in agriculture.
- vi. Since there are no unions for workers in the agriculture sector there is a need for organizing unions for women agricultural labourers to avail benefits in different sectors and also to raise their voice against any form of discrimination.

**d) Legal and Administrative Measures**

Legal and administrative measures should be adopted to improve social conditions of women in rural areas and also access to productive resources should be provided to women agricultural labourers.

- i. Government should give loans, subsidies, land, equipment, finance and other assistance to assist female agricultural labourers in setting up an industry and generating employment.
- ii. Implementing the Tenancy Acts and Inheritance Laws for providing equal rights to women in agricultural holdings.
- iii. Imparting land rights to women will not only make them economically strong but it will also help in them to take their own decisions and work for the welfare of family.

- iv. Women's rights in agricultural land should not be different for different states. It should come under one jurisdiction. All the state land Reform Acts must not discriminate against women and should consider them the rightful heir.

Finally, the society at large and men in particular should be aware of the significant role of women in agriculture. Only then can the women agricultural workers of Uttar Pradesh as well as those across India can be assured of getting their due and also contribute in the growth of agricultural sector, which even today sustains a large proportion of the population in the country.

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